QUEER MIGRATION AND SENSE OF PLACE IN HAMILTON, ONTARIO

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SENSE OF PLACE AND MIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF QUEER ADULTS IN HAMILTON, ONTARIO

CARIS TOWLE, MA

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Lay Abstract

This thesis studies the experiences of queer adults who have moved to Hamilton, Ontario. Fourteen (n=14) individuals who are queer (2SLGBTQIA+) were interviewed over Zoom and asked questions regarding their experiences with gender and sexuality, the places they had lived in before Hamilton, and how their moving process to Hamilton went. They were also asked about their overall feelings and connections they held toward various places in Hamilton, which together are referred to as 'sense of place'. The interviews were recorded and examined both individually and together for important themes related to sense of place and migration. Most participants felt positively about their experiences moving to and living in Hamilton, were optimistic about their future in the city, but also didn't expect to remain in Hamilton for the long term. This thesis ultimately contributes to the existing research on queer people, migration, and sense of place by offering a careful in-depth treatment of a small number of cases, as well as finding interesting data about how queer individuals move through their worlds and navigate barriers to their mobility.

Abstract

This thesis studies the experiences of queer adults in Hamilton, Ontario with sense of place and migration. Fourteen (n=14) individuals who self-identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ were interviewed over Zoom between 2022 and 2023, all of whom had moved to Hamilton but lived in Canada immediately prior to moving to Hamilton. This study applies an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA), informed by the geographic and phenomenological literature, which is appropriate to a small number of cases and attends to context and intersubjectivity. Each interview was analytically coded for dominant themes in an individual's migration timeline, with special attention paid to their gender and sexual identity and how they relate to other people and places. Collective analysis of the interviews yielded three different perspectives on these participants' experiences: embodiment as it relates to spatiality, sense of place, and migration decision making and barriers. The results of this thesis contribute to existing literature on lived experiences of gender, romantic, and sexual minorities (GRSM) and sense of place research. Together, they challenge dominant understandings of sense of place with a holistic perspective on how space is lived phenomenally. They also challenge discursive narratives of queer friendly or unfriendly spaces, highlighting the nuance in individual perceptions of various spaces and the importance of past experiences and social connections in these perceptions. Among the material circumstances that precondition queer migration decisions are housing affordability, safety, and community. I conclude by emphasizing how important these considerations are in the current and immanent political climate in which queer individuals are increasingly precariously visible, making further research on this subject crucial.

Acknowledgements

McMaster University and the city of Hamilton are located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudnesaunee nations, in the Between the Lakes Treaty (No. 3). The university's presence still enforces and benefits from colonialism, and I am indebted to the Indigenous stewards of this land for the ability to conduct my research here. On this land I live, play, and work, but most importantly I've discovered myself. I've found community, formed friendships, and made personal connections to the land, water, and people that have foundationally shaped who I am. What I've learned from my relationship to the land and from its first peoples is to give back as much as I've been given, and this includes my research. The queer people and communities I've engaged with in the production of this knowledge I've therefore tried to keep at the center of my work and at the forefront of the justice I aim to do with it. I also hope that my work honours future generations of Two-Spirit and queer people who live here.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Bruce Newbold, and my supervisory committee: Dr. Rob Wilton, Dr. Allison Williams, and external examiners Dr. Rachel Silvey and Dr. David Murray, for their guidance and support. To Dr. Melanie Bedore, thank you for making my academic experience so much more vibrant. And finally, I extend my gratitude to Dr. Bonnie Freeman for sharing her knowledge and insight with me.

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Finally, to my wife, Brooks, for your years of emotional and material support, your constant encouragement, and especially your patience throughout this grueling process. I am here today because of you.

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Table 1: Comprehensive Table of Participants

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Age	Birthplace	Moved to Hamilton	Self-Identification
Lilith	she/her	18	Calgary	2022	trans woman
Sarah	she/her; they/them	24	Montréal	2021	bisexual; pansexual; queer
Sam	she/her	28	Edmonton	2021	queer; bisexual
Kit	they/them	28	North Bay	2021	non-binary; genderqueer
Olivia	she/her	29	Mississauga	2021	queer
T	she/her; siya	29	Calgary	2018	agender; gray asexual; queer
Rey	they/them	29	Brazil	2021	non-binary; transgender; queer
Nicole	she/her	31	Windsor	2021	bisexual; queer
Barbara	she/her	32	Simcoe	2019	lesbian
Gillian	she/her	32	Kenya	2018	trans woman; bisexual
Megan	she/her	33	Hamilton	2022	queer
Chris	they/them	34	London	2022	non-binary; gay; lesbian; queer
Sophija	she/her	34	USSR	2016	trans woman; bisexual
Marie	she/her	36	Victoria	2018	undefined

Table 2: List of Canadian Cities (Permanent Residences) Featured Across Migration Timelines

City	Frequency	Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)	Province
Toronto	5	Toronto	Ontario
London	4	London	Ontario
Victoria	4	Victoria	British Columbia
Mississauga	3	Toronto	Ontario
Montréal	3	Montréal	Québec
Burlington	2	Hamilton	Ontario
Calgary	2	Calgary	Alberta
Fredericton	2	Fredericton	New Brunswick
Oakville	2	Toronto	Ontario
St. Catharines	2	St. Catharines	Ontario
Abbotsford	1	Abbotsford	British Columbia
Brampton	1	Toronto	Ontario
Edmonton	1	Edmonton	Alberta
Guelph	1	Guelph	Ontario
Ottawa	1	Ottawa	Ontario
Sudbury	1	Sudbury	Ontario
Vancouver	1	Vancouver	British Columbia
Windsor	1	Windsor	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	British Columbia
[deidentified city]	1	-	Newfoundland and Labrador
North Bay	1	-	Ontario
Simcoe	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario

Terminology[1]

Agender – Describes an individual who does not identify with any gender or for whom gender is irrelevant.
Allonormativity – The assumption that all individuals experience sexual and romantic attraction.
Amatonormativity – The assumption that all individuals desire, or should desire, and/or pursue a monogamous, long-term sexual and/or romantic relationship.
Asexual – Describes an individual who experiences little or no sexual *attraction* (regardless of one's relationship to sexual activity or libido).
Bisexual – Describes an individual who experiences sexual attraction to more than one gender.
Cisgender[2] – Describes an individual who is not trans, or whose gender is the same as their gender assigned at birth.
Cisnormativity – The assumption that all individuals are/will be cisgender, which results in cissexist values and institutions.
GRSM – Gender, Romantic, and Sexual Minorities.
Heteronormativity – The assumption that all individuals are/will be heterosexual and/or heteromantic, which results in heterosexist values and institutions.
Homonormativity – The assumption that all gender, romantic, and sexual minorities are gay or lesbian; or, the privileging of cisgender, allosexual homosexuality within queer spaces.
Intersex – Describes an individual whose sex characteristics (e.g., chromosomal, hormonal, anatomical) fall outside of the conventional notions of male or female.
Non-binary – Describes an individual whose gender does not conform exclusively to the man/woman binary.
Polyamory – Describes an individual who has, or wants to have, a romantic relationship with more than one other person.
Queer – Describes, by self-identification, an individual whose gender, romantic, or sexual identity diverges from normative gender, romantic, or sexual identities.
Transgender[3] – Describes an individual whose gender differs from their gender assigned at birth.
Two-Spirit (2S) – An umbrella term used by Indigenous Peoples to describe individuals who do not fall into the colonial binary of gender and sexuality or conventional roles of men and women. These include Indigenous individuals who are LGBTQIA+.
2SLGBTQIA+ – A standardized acronym used to refer to an open-ended range of gender, romantic, and sexual identities (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Aromantic, Agender, etc.).

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[1] There are identities represented in this list that were absent from the study sample, such as Two-Spirit (2S) and Intersex people. These communities deserve greater attention in research that I hope I can contribute to in the future.
[2] Cissexual is an alternate but less common term, usually used in relation to 'transsexual'.
[3] Transsexual is an alternate but less common term, regarded in some contexts as outdated but retained or reclaimed by some within trans communities. The prefix 'trans' in this study refers to all individuals who self-identify as transgender, transsexual, transvestite, gender non-conforming, or any other identity for which they might use 'trans' as a shorthand. The degree to which these terms might overlap is highly subjective.

Introduction

Authorship

In 2020, amidst the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 'shutting down' of the economy, I moved from Kingston to Hamilton to start my doctoral degree at McMaster. That same fall, I also began socially and medically transitioning. I was still unfamiliar with Hamilton; I had uprooted myself from any previous social networks and financial stability and found myself in a rather precarious situation marked by a lot of uncertainty. The challenges that seemingly everyone faced during COVID-19 were compounded, for me, with difficulties navigating two transitions—one that was spatial, defined by a 'moving in' to a new place; and one that was social, characterized by my 'coming out' as transgender. My decision to conduct my research on these topics was therefore informed by my experiences as an asexual and transsexual woman, and as a newcomer to Hamilton.

Like the queer and trans individuals who participated in this research, I faced (and still face) a number of social and material challenges as a gender and sexual minority, both as a long-term resident and as a newcomer to places. My gender and sexuality have been perceived as a strangeness, or deviation, or threat to expressions of gender and sexuality that are regarded as acceptable. In some cases, these perceptions have resulted in ostracization or discrimination, though I have the privilege of not being the most vulnerable in our communities to queer- and transphobia. As I discuss in the conclusions of this research, the current sociopolitical climate is one in which 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals face an unprecedented level of visibility in cultural conversations, media, and government. I hope this research is the beginning of further work I can contribute to the knowledge and liberation of queer and trans folks.

Clarifications

There is no way of setting out to study the "sense of place of queer people who have moved" without suddenly finding yourself overwhelmed with three independent and seemingly inexhaustible bodies of research. Throughout this work, I engage with literature from phenomenology, sense of place studies, migration studies, and queer studies, though to varying degrees. Consequently, this task comes with a number of points for clarification.

First, several terms and abbreviations are used in this document to refer to an overlapping but not identical group of people (see *Terminology*): these include GRSM, 2SLGBTQIA+, queer, and LGBTQA. GRSM, (gender, romantic, and sexual minorities) is used in the theoretical discussions that follow because it is broad, non-exhaustive, and elastic, in that it doesn't need to change with the inclusion of identities that might otherwise be relegated to the '+' in '2SLGBTQIA+'. While the latter begins by exclusion and adds identities upon their being seen and taken up by the most privileged of us, GRSM, by its definition, includes all of us at its outset. It is also favourable because it emphasizes more what these identities have in common than what their differences are; that is, their marginalization within our current society under systems like cisheteropatriarchy and colonialism. Such a perspective is useful for community and political organizing, as has historically been necessary and effective. Thus, when discussing the broader theoretical background of this study and its implications, I generally use GRSM to describe its population of interest.

2SLGBTQIA+, while common and recognizable, is perhaps more historically indebted to white, homonormative movements that centered white cisgender gay men and lesbians (Gay Liberation Front, etc.). Starting as GLB, their later inclusion of other marginalized identities (some letters representing more than one group), was only achieved with the efforts of activists in criticizing this exclusionary history that ignored the contributions of those who were at the forefront of queer liberation from the very beginning: Black trans women, street queens, transvestites, bisexuals, and queer people of colour (Baumann, 2019; Stryker & Sullivan, 2023, Gill-Peterson, 2024). The central purpose of the term for this study was for recruitment, so that potential participants understood exactly who was being sought out for this research.

Queer, which for several decades was used as a pejorative towards GRSMs, has been reclaimed since the gay liberation movement by people across these communities. It is now frequently used as an umbrella term for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals but is nonetheless insufficient or inappropriate to apply to everyone. Its use in this thesis is predominantly to serve as a shorthand for the participants in this study, as most of them self-identified as queer. However, LGBTQA will also be used due to its precision in representing the individuals actually involved in this study. Thus, while the above terms are often used interchangeably, my usage of each term is intentional and precise and aligns with other current scholarship on queer communities (Dhari et al., 2023; Rosenberg, 2023).

It should be noted that the various identities these terms and acronyms represent do not have the same experiences or outlooks on the world. My decision to focus on the collective of queer individuals was for several reasons: 1) the historical precedent that queer individuals have faced common struggles against cisheteropatriarchy, 2) the methodological reason that recruitment was difficult even without narrowing down this target population, so doing so was unfeasible, and 3) the fact that gender and sexuality overlap significantly and cannot be fully understand in isolation (Kondelin, 2014). It is for this latter reason that intensive thematic analysis, I believe, is most appropriate for analyzing queer experiences of place, and in effect, a queer phenomenology. The inherent diversity in what it means to be queer—not just within the range of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities, but at numerous intersections with age, race, disability, and class—poses important issues for migration and sense of place studies.

Those experiences that queer communities find in common, however, are not reducible to our marginalization. They are also characterized by our *own* productive practices, by which we exercise our *own* power. Put simply, queer individuals all have some experience with non-normative ways of understanding gender and sexuality, whatever the barriers, conducements, agencies, and struggles are that precondition these ways of understanding. A central concern of mine since the outset of my research was in doing epistemic justice, first to the participants in this study, and second to queer communities at large. To do so, I used a process of verification in which the researcher (myself) and the participants engaged in the co-production of knowledge: this consisted of semi-structured interviews focussed on the participants' own emphases and storytelling. But further, I remained in contact with participants over the course of the analysis and writing in order to ensure that my representations of their ideas and stories were accurate, honest, and true to who they are. Finally, I aim to distribute this thesis to the many stakeholders involved in its production so that they can see and benefit from the results of their collaboration.

More than 25 years ago, Jeffrey Escoffier published *American Homo: Community and Perversity*, a historical analysis of gay and lesbian public and private life, as well as its associated discourses within institutions, from WW2 through to post-Stonewall and the gay liberation movement. Speaking to this historical period, Escoffier writes: "It is almost impossible

to know what effect the popular sociology literature had on homosexuals themselves—there were no surveys, and no one collected readership statistics or sales figures to tell us who or how many people read these books. Because I was a young man coming to terms with my homosexuality at that time, I will use myself as a piece of evidence in gauging the significance of this small body of publications" (2018[1998], pp. 81). This lack of qualitative ethnographic literature on queer communities still poses challenges to this research today. Even upon the publication of *American Homo*, queer discourse had been dominated, in both public consciousness and academia, by the lens of white cisgender sexualities, and often the perspectives of gay men. My research seeks to amplify the voices of trans and non-binary folks, as well as queer cisgender women, but I hope that my own experiences as a queer person and migrant to Hamilton will guide my discussion in a reasonable manner—not as a data point, but as a contextual frame for the discussion.

Goal and Structure of the Work

In *Ordinary (small) Cities and LGBQ Lives* (2013), Tiffany Myrdahl expresses the aim of "showcasing the significance of everyday geographies for those who are perceived to be, or see themselves as, 'different', [...] where social difference is understood largely in terms of sexuality" (pp. 285). These are two important but intertwined relations: perceiving oneself as different and being perceived as different could aptly summarize the everyday lives of queer people in a society constructed to center heterosexuality, cissexuality, and allosexuality. As I will later show, this difference is a central part of phenomenological research.

Myrdahl's title is telling; she notes the important caveat that, "I employ the acronym LBGQ to denote people who participate in a range of practices that sit on/outside the boundaries of normative heterosexuality and/or gender performance… the particularities of trans geographies are beyond the scope of this article" (pp. 280). There is a methodological utility to making this distinction, and perhaps even justification for bracketing research on trans experiences in particular. But the flip side of this is the fact—and it's been stressed among recent discourse—that gender and sexual experiences have a great degree of overlap, and perhaps more in common than in difference. For instance, Kondelin (2014) argues: "…sexual orientation can be seen to take part in our lived gender. On the other hand, bisexuality or pansexuality are not as likely to function in this way, as they determine neither the gender of their subject nor that of their object – sexual orientation and gender cannot be understood as one and the same… Because of the proximity of gender and sexuality to each other, and their many points of entanglement, gender can produce an effect that reads as sexuality and vice versa" (pp. 38). Because of this entanglement between gender and sexuality, changes in one can affect changes in the other, including the disorientations we feel when we live out our genders and sexualities in the world and others encounter us through them.

In this work, I set out to address these research questions: What can phenomenology tell us about sense of place for certain people, in this case queer folks? How do queer people interpret their migration experiences? And what does Hamilton as a city mean to queer newcomers?

The structure of this work will be divided into five chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 explain the theoretical and methodological background of the thesis respectively. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 can be read as standalone empirical analyses of the research data due to the fact that each of these chapters was submitted for peer-review and publication in academic journals. Consequently,

within these chapters themselves, I refer to them as 'papers', while in the rest of the work they will be referred to as chapters. I also use the first-person plural in the analytical chapters while I use the singular in the rest of the thesis—again, for the purpose of publication. All this being said, all three of these analytical chapters will address different but interrelated themes from the same study sample.

In the first chapter, I review the literature on sense of place from a critical lens and indicate how my work draws from this body of research. This chapter comprises much of the reading list material that I engaged with at the outset of my research. In the second chapter, I outline the methodology I use in my work, namely *interpretive phenomenology*, explaining some key concepts from both classic and current phenomenology that I employ. In the third chapter, I analyze experiences of *embodiment*—that is, the phenomenon of *being* a body and relating to the world *as* a body—in order to illuminate how queer subjects navigate and contribute to the production of *social space*. In the fourth chapter, I examine how the sense of place of queer subjects develops over time and across migrations by unpacking various aspects of sense of place, including sense-perception, social relations, and discourse. In the fifth chapter, I examine the decision-making processes that queer subjects underwent when considering and carrying out a migration, as well as the barriers they faced throughout their journey, and how they reflect upon their experiences now.

Among the most discernible commonalities between the final three chapters is their focus on queer subjectivities and space/place. However, they are organized according to a spatiotemporal movement: from the body, the subject, and the other; to sense of place, change, and community over larger place and timescales; to finally, migration decision-making through retention (memory and reflection), immanence (here and now) and protention (anticipation and possibility). In each of these chapters, embodiment, sense of place, and mobility are always at the forefront of the analysis, with each aspect being given different emphasis throughout. In the broader context of the literature, I hope that this research serves two main purposes: first, to add to a very limited body of research on the regional migration of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals; and second, to contribute to methodological discussions pertaining to sense of place research in general.

Chapter One: Conceptualizing a Holistic Sense of Place

For the most part, a coherent concept of 'sense of place' in academic research remains elusive. Mendoza and Moren-Alegret (2013) commented a decade ago that "the discussion on 'sense of place' from a multidisciplinary perspective certainly implies an epistemological debate, due to the differences in the philosophical bases of the methods" (pp. 764). They frame this debate as primarily one of positivism versus phenomenology, which is often the case today (Zahavi, 2003, pp. 128); however, this dichotomy is historically contingent. Phenomenology developed as a response to the perceived issues with idealist and empiricist epistemologies (Taipale, 2014), and with its development it diverged in its epistemological and ontological foundations. There are, consequently, phenomenological worldviews that disagree fundamentally on the nature of 'being' (e.g., *essence* in Husserl versus Heidegger; *unity* in Heidegger versus Merleau-Ponty[4]), which, when taken seriously, have different methodological implications. There are also certain positivist methods that are ontologically consistent with certain phenomenological methods, which I will expand on in the following discussion. What sense of place scholars are today confronted with therefore is a phenomenology which makes no ontological commitments nor specifies its object of research, but is rather a method (Heidegger, 2010[1953], pp. 26; Taipale, 2014, pp. 7), or more precisely, a category of method. But my goal here will be less a critique of sense of place research than an attempt to examine the topic and its treatment across multidisciplinary research in order to clarify its importance for my work.

Philosophically, the term 'sense of place' implies a relationship between a subject (i.e. doing the sensing) and an object or objects (i.e. place). Multidisciplinary work tends to agree on this basic description. Raymond et al. (2017), for example, define sense of place as "the human connection to places" (pp. 1). Geographers also tend to understand it, most broadly, as people-place relationships (Counted, 2016), often with an emphasis on the meaning imbued in place by subjects, which has been a durable and consistent theme throughout the history of the discipline (Tuan, 1977; Malpas, 1999; Williams et al. 2010). But the nature of this subject-place relationship and the mode of being of both subject and place are at first unclear. What is subject? What is place? Is the relationship between them an epistemic one, and if so, then how is this knowledge obtained? For geography in particular, how important is our ontology when dealing with place? If phenomenology does not assume a particular ontological view, including as to human beings and places, then how are we as geographers to approach the question of people-place relationships? In this chapter, I will address these questions before concluding with their implications for research on queer experiences.

On the one hand, sense of place is not just an ontological relation, because the 'givenness' of place depends upon what Husserl called the intuiting subject:

> "Empirical intuition, more specifically, sense-experience, is consciousness of an individual object, and as an intuiting agency 'brings it to givenness': as perception, to primordial givenness, to the consciousness of grasping the object in 'a primordial way', in its *'bodily'* selfhood. On quite similar lines essential intuition is the consciousness of something, of an 'object', a something towards which its glance is directed, a something

[4] Heidegger proposed the 'unity' of a thing was given by its ontological status, while Merleau-Ponty emphasized that 'unity' is grasped through the perceptual horizon. My discussion later focusses on the latter.

> 'self-given' within it; but which can then be 'presented' in other acts, vaguely or distinctly thought, made the subject of true and false predictions…" (2017[1931], pp. 55)

This 'bodily selfhood' to which Husserl refers is of central importance, not only for the objects we perceive, but because one's self-awareness and their awareness of their environment are fundamentally 'embodied' (Taipale, 2014, pp. 21). I return to this in Chapters 2 and 3.

On the other hand, sense of place is not just an epistemic relation (how we come to knowledge of place) because it does not imply any single way of knowing (e.g., perception or understanding) in its formation, nor must it necessitate one (e.g., as in a focus on meaning). Put bluntly, 'sense of place' as a concept does not determine the nature of place or of subject, nor their relationship to one another; these are, however, taken for granted in many discussions on sense of place when instead they ought to be informed by our philosophical framework. Merleau-Ponty explained the multi-faceted nature of perception which is indeed no less applicable to sense of place:

> "The *Cogito* has, up until our present day, devalued the perception of others; it has taught me that the I is only accessible to itself, since it has defined me through the thought that I have of myself, which I am clearly alone in having, at least in this ultimate sense. In order for the word 'other' not to be meaningless, my existence must never reduce itself to the consciousness that I have of existing; it must in fact encompass the consciousness that *one* might have of it, and so also encompass my embodiment in a nature and at least the possibility of an historical situation" (2014 [1945], pp. xxvi).

Conceptually, therefore, sense of place emerges from the interplay between multiple ontological and epistemological traditions, resulting in different meanings throughout academic research that aren't reducible to disciplines or methods. Our being *in* place (being *of* place for Merleau-Ponty; *being-in-the-world* for Heidegger) is often taken for granted as *either* preconditioned by our ideas, or externally real as a matter of fact, or constructed socially, etc.; similarly, our knowledge *of* place is informed *either* through transcendental ideals, or through direct perception or dialectically, etc. However, as a result of this incoherence in its emergence as a concept, sense of place has, by necessity, become reified as an object in itself, rather than being a *description of experience*. If sense of place is not the relation but rather the object, then researchers are forced to commit to a limited ontological assumption to study it, which influences our epistemology and methods.

I will illustrate this problem and the above observations with a review of sense of place research and what I identify as prevalent ontological dispositions within it:

1. Sense-Perceptive (as subject-place dualism; the self and the external world)
2. Relational
3. Discursive

Within sense of place research, these dispositions are taken up as ontological foundations, in which cases I refer to them as ontologies. However, in my sense of place framework, I refer to these ontologies as *dimensions* of sense of place research, in that they are merely partial aspects of experience, *as place is experienced* as such, and this follows from my phenomenological method. This examination of sense of place research follows loosely from Edward Soja's critique of space in geographic thought:

> "As socially produced space, spatiality can be distinguished from the physical space of material nature and the mental space of cognition and representation, each of which is used and incorporated into the social construction of spatiality but cannot be conceptualized as its equivalent. Within certain limits (which are frequently overlooked) physical and psychological processes and forms can be theorized independently with regard to their spatial dimensions and attributes. The classical debates in the history of science over the absolute versus relative qualities of physical space exemplify the former, while attempts to explore the personal meaning and symbolic content of 'mental maps' and landscape imagery illustrate the latter. This possibility of independent conceptualization and inquiry, however, does not produce an unquestionable autonomy or rigid separation between these three spaces (physical, mental, social), for they interrelate and overlap. Defining these interconnections remains one of the most formidable challenges to contemporary social theory, especially since the historical debate has been monopolized by the physical-mental dualism almost to the exclusion of social space (Soja, 2011, pp. 120).

My approach does not directly adapt Soja's analysis of space, but because it entails the relationship between subject and place, I will examine how the three 'spaces' above (physical, mental, social) have been configured and overlap *within* sense of place research. For example (and I expand on this later), the sense-perceptive ontology emphasizes an interplay between the physical and mental, and because of its engagement with both these spaces, underpins disciplines and methods that are often otherwise considered distinct, or whose distinctiveness is perhaps exaggerated.

We might say that the three ontological foundations I discuss embody different combinations of these spatial dimensions (physical-mental, social-physical, mental-social). And while my analysis will point out how this *can* be the case, it is important not to confine sense of place research to such a constraint. My own analysis, like Soja's, is simply one way of categorizing concepts and approaches to research. This framework doesn't organize sense of place research based on method, discipline, or epistemological school, but rather based on the ontological assumptions at its foundation. Ultimately pragmatic, my framework allows sense of place research to be more comprehensible and applicable. Applicable because, in my own use, it maps onto GRSMs quite clearly: gender, romance, and sexuality all have their physical, mental, and social correlates, which queer scholars have by now robustly demonstrated, but which interdisciplinary research has failed to engage with robustly. With these clarifications, I now turn to the review of sense of place[5] research.

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[5] A note on the term: 'sense of place' in an empiricist usage is a non-sequitur. 'Sensing' in this regard refers to the grasping of a quality of an object – like *red, round*, and *hard* being qualities of an apple – which is often contrasted with the understanding, or the way a mind reflects upon those qualities of the object. Today, 'sense of place' (especially its qualitative representations) understands 'sensing' as perception, which, more accurately, includes the totality of these classicist notions of sensation, reflection, etc. Phenomenologically, 'sensing' refers not to 'sensations' but rather to "a mode of immediate bodily self-awareness" (Taipale, 2014, pp. 13). 'Place', on the other hand, is *always already* a gestalt. It is not regarded empirically as a 'thing-in-itself' with qualities, except in the case of perhaps a point in Euclidean 'space', in which case it possesses no qualities (Husserl, 2017[1931], pp. 129). Consequently, the 'place' that sense of place refers to can only be grasped through more than just an empiricist 'sensing' (as it requires at the very least reflection), and hence the non-sequitur. When speaking precisely of places, I sometimes use the term *site*, which refers to the phenomenon of a place as it is encountered by a subjectivity in its

Sense of Place: Three Dimensions

Sense-Perceptive (Subject-Place Dualism)

In the sense-perceptive ontology, sense of place is a mental construct dissolved into basic elements, such as objects of the senses and their properties (colour, sound, shape, etc.), as well as memory and emotion (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2011; Mendoza & Moren-Alegret, 2013; Rishbeth & Powell, 2013; Raymond et al., 2017; McCunn & Gifford, 2018). This disposition in sense of place research is frequently championed by psychology, though it informs other disciplines, including geography. Similar to the classical empiricists, the form that objects of our environment take is mediated by our perception and subsequently reflected upon, but the 'real' nature of place is obscured beneath the subjective consciousness (Casey, 2001), and the ontological questions surrounding place are of lesser concern, as is the role of intersubjectivity. In other words, 'sense of place' and 'place' are objects *in themselves* as well as independent of one another.

Memory and emotion do much of the epistemic heavy lifting in this framework because they are the primary, if not only, interpretive mediums for perception that are assumed (the modality of perception being the senses). This is the focus of Rishbeth and Powell's (2013) work on place attachment; they dissolve 'sense of place' into the mental components of mnemonic memory (visual triggers) and embodied memory (sensory immersive qualities of a place). Both these forms of memory are prompted by sensory experience and come with emotional associations that participants have with their environment. This facilitates a process by which migrants discern between 'familiarity' and 'strangeness' in their new environment. We might therefore understand the anatomy of sense of place here as containing the ontic properties of physical features like places and minds (to which the body is subordinated), and the epistemic properties of sense and memory (first experience and later reflection, similar to Locke's empirical use of 'retention' (2004[1689], pp. 147]). This is where we observe the physical-mental overlap of Soja's framework at play, and why he refers to mental and physical 'spaces.'

Merleau-Ponty criticized this priority of memory in perception, attributing it to an empiricism that takes for granted the reliance on it to organize the "sensible chaos" of our experiences. He states, "The evocation of memory becomes superfluous the moment that it is made possible, since the work that we expect from it has thus already been accomplished" (2014, pp. 20). Here, the interpretive subjective—though not yet *inter*subjective—component to perception is introduced, and this I return to later on.

Raymond et al. (2017) suggest that "['place as a locus of attachment'] is based on an interactionist worldview in psychology. In this worldview: 1) reality comes divided into subjects and objects in that aspects of the environment are seen as independent of the properties of human minds or bodies…" (pp. 2). Alternatively, "place as a center of meaning" emphasizes the "interpretative approach to cognition." Raymond et al. criticize sense of place scholarship as committing to either place as a "locus of attachment" *or* as a "center of meaning," and paying too little attention to the joint effect of these processes. While true, the dualistic concept of sense of place is helpful in several methodological applications. They summarize:

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worldly "being-at-hand". Thus, my following review of sense of place research will approach the treatment of this concept contra the above interpretation.

> "In a review of the literature, Lewicka (2011) found that physical factors have been found to be stronger predictors of place attachment among higher income respondents, whereas social ties are more important among lower income respondents. Scannell and Gifford (2010) found that physical factors were more important reasons for attachment to the city whereas social factors were more important to the home and region" (2017, pp. 5).

These empirical results present great potential for further enquiry into the lived experiences of each of these groups as well as others not included in the studies. It also raises further questions around the material conditions that shape one's sense of place. But for the purpose of my phenomenological method, these findings present us with important ontic considerations about the distinct being of a place and how subjects apprehend 'places' as such.

Scannell and Gifford (2010), off of whose work Rishbeth and Powell based their own, use a 'three-dimensional framework' to conceptualize sense of place: person, place, and process. This framework dissolves the subject into 1) person (which is both an individual consciousness and a cultural identity) and 2) process—effectively, the psychological (which is composed of affect, cognition, and behavior). There is little clarity as to why, for example, memory and emotion are distinct from "person", or why "culture" is distinct from place. But these distinctions seem to imply that unlike process and place, person is a fixed, ahistorical given rather than a fluid identity. Despite the overlap they acknowledge must exist between them, Scannell and Gifford take for granted these categories in themselves, which might benefit from the more holistic approach advocated for by Raymond et al.

Trabka (2019) took this step by interviewing 60 participants who had moved from Poland to London or Oslo, emphasizing the common research themes of place dependence and place identity, but understanding these in a chronological process of sense of place development. Place attachment unfolds over the life course in cognitive stages such that the subject-place dualism, while still maintained over time, evolves in the modes of cognition that define this relationship. Trabska's work demonstrates how meaning is ascribed to place as a finality: a culmination of the process by which basic sensory elements are dissolved and subsequently 'interpreted' by memory and emotion—a strikingly familiar process.

Phenomenologically, we might understand this dissolution as that the subject is torn between recognizing the unity of the object and the multiplicity of its properties (Hegel, 1977[1807], pp. 68–69). In fact, this is what the researcher grapples with: the desire for an empirical unity that is 'sense of place', but the methodological necessity of dissolving it into multiplicities. And this problem only compounds itself in the interaction between the researcher and participant; the former setting the conditions of possibility for what the latter reports. The result of this instability is that sense of place becomes the *idealization* of place, the object (this is not the same as representation). I discuss the methodological implications of this process later with regards to scale, which can be understood as a *mode of being* of a place.

The clearest examples of this unity-multiplicity dichotomy are exhibited by a variety of methods that may not apply the same epistemology but nonetheless emphasize sense-perception; such as mental mapping (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010; Gieseking, 2013; Lazarenko, 2020), go-along methods (Bergeron et al., 2014; Chan et al., 2021) and quantifications of sense of place using scores (Williams et al., 2010; Agyekum & Newbold, 2019), all of which attempt idealizations of sense of place that wrestle with this dichotomy of the ideal unity and its components. Mental maps, to use one example, are a mental representation of a place, through which we can understand a subject's *sense of* place. But mental mapping, limited as it often is to

semiotics, is most often employed at a relatively fixed spatial scale, ranging from a neighborhood to a city; we seldom think of a single room as a 'place', or even multiple, fluid scales, when speaking of sense of place.

Given this brief summary of the sense-perceptive ontology that appears in sense of place research, we can take away a few key points: that the empirical data demonstrate important meanings associated between people and the places they inhabit, and that these meanings form over a psychological flow of sensory experiences and interpretations. The memories and emotions which emerge from this process are of key importance for *attunement*, but raise the questions of intersubjectivity and embodiment, all of which I return to later in this chapter.

Relational

On a broad basis, relational ontologies deal with 'space' as emergent from the interactions of actors. Relational theorists expand the definition of relations from social connections between humans to the interactions that occur between all living and nonliving actors. Because geographers (alongside other related disciplines) regard sense of place in terms of people-place relationships, the term 'sense of place' isn't always explicitly used in this relational framework, despite researchers dealing with the same concepts that comprise it.

Within this tradition, sense of place has been explored notably through actor-network theory (ANT) (Haywood, 2013; Acott & Urquhart, 2014; Bawaka Country including Wright et al., 2016). In ANT, 'sense of place' is not understood as a unity, with subject and place juxtaposed as in the sense-perceptive ontology. Instead, the subject-place dualism is merged together, and is, in some degree, *produced* by subject interactions (Latour, 1996; 2005). Subjects and objects, however, become less distinct and instead are regarded as actors. Place is a site where actors converge and interact within a network of flows, and this site emerges ever so briefly where, as the classic phenomenologists might say, the immediacy of "this here now" occurs (Merleau-Ponty, 2014; Husserl, 2017, pp. 117). Thus a 'sense of place' is characterized most in *doing* rather than *perceiving*, or as Heidegger put it, through the *being-at-hand* of things. This emphasis on doing is also given a particular degree of importance in *The Site of the Social* (2002), where Theodore Schatzki identifies four kinds of social relations: causal relations, spatial relations, intentionality, and prefiguration (pp. 41). Another term for spatial relations is what he calls *activity-place space*, or "a matrix of places and paths where activities are performed" (pp. 43). In all of these accounts, stress is placed on the utility of things for me—a utility that comes from their *being-near* to me, which also gives being to *this place*.

With relational place, forms and essences (in the dualistic tradition) don't exist per se, so place is not necessarily understood as an 'object' in itself. Furthermore, non-human actors too are not understood as *mere* objects perceived by subjects but are 'affective' of the subject and environment. In other words, regardless of whatever ontological distinction actors have from subjects and objects (which is not the topic of my concern), they can certainly interact *with* subjects. From this premise the epistemic implications follow: if place is not an 'object' but emergent from the confluence of interactions *between* objects, then we can arrive at sense of place best by tracing these interactions. Hence the focus on activity spaces and (in other words) micro-geographies.

Unsurprisingly, this relational camp has emerged largely within sociological and geographic research. Felder (2021) problematizes the concept of familiarity introduced in the previous section with Rishbeth and Powell (2013). Felder states: "This [familiarization] process

is often presented in its individual, cognitive dimensions, but I emphasize its relational dimension: familiarity is a collective achievement" (pp. 181). The familiarization process occurs through "a regularity of practices" and routines; a difference which is useful in understanding how certain populations 'practice' their identity. Felder characterizes the feeling of being 'out of place' as familiarity being threatened by change or uncertainty. For example:

> "...being a woman, having a disability, being black, being LGBTQ, or wearing a veil is enough to prevent development of a familiar relationship with one's environment. Instead of appearing as a whole, for people who are constantly under threat or surveilled, one's surroundings may appear as a collection of potentially dangerous elements that must be evaluated with care" (pp. 188).

In the geographic vein, Berg (2020) studied the life histories of four couples in Norway who had initially moved from urban areas to rural areas, pursuing the narrative of settling down in the idyllic countryside. Berg revisited the same participants many years later for a follow-up interview. They summarized their methodology as follows:

> "Life history interview as a method of data generation follows naturally from the extended life course approach because of what this type of interview can reveal about the past and the role of history, memory and tradition in the social construction of place. Thus, the method allows me to explore migration as a process that includes pre- and post-migration life, and brings to the fore how wellbeing and place attachment are connected, situated and relational, and therefore in constant production and reproduction" (pp. 439).

The migration timeline is an important perspective not only for its comparative use, but because of the importance of spatial horizons in phenomenological inquiry. While from a life history perspective these spatial horizons are taken up in a temporal form, this thesis seeks to emphasize, or rather return to, the spatial fundamentality of migration and place-based experiences.

With one couple, Berg found that community attachment could be a barrier to newcomers in integrating into a rural setting where many community members have long-standing ties with each other already. Over time, these "traditionally/socially attached" villagers had engaged in "...drawing a picture of Catherine and Peter as 'the strange, difficult city people'. The family was 'othered' and deemed not to belong, and consequently felt increasingly 'out of place' and unhappy. Their story shows, as underscored above, that well-being should be perceived as a set of effects produced in times and places" (pp. 441). Not only does this sentiment of alienation resonate within queer narratives, but it demonstrates the translatability of Berg's model of well-being in general.

The story of a different couple, however, emphasized the importance of non-human entities in producing attachment to place. These included farm buildings, machinery, gardens, and the variety of animals on their farm—sheep (which they farmed), cats and dogs (their pets), and wild animals that visited the farm. Anne and Karl had formed not only their sense of place but their identities around their sheep farm, and the mutual relationship they had with their sheep as 'family members' and individuals in themselves: "They described a sense of being part of something much bigger than themselves and 'this something' was incorporated into daily life" (pp. 442).

Memory and emotion are not absent from Berg's work, but they are framed as a lens through which to understand one's own relationship to others, place, and health. As they recall of another participant: "Mona expressed in an everyday language that belonging is relational, performative and more-than-human and it is not predetermined but comes into being through affective encounters, through doing, being, knowing, and becoming in careful, responsive ways" (pp. 444). A common thread throughout these urban-rural migrant life histories is the relational nature of sense of place, particularly in contributing to a holistic well-being. Indeed, for every couple, place attachment is preconditioned by the socio-material relations of places and the kinds of 'doing' they allow.

Another application of the relational framework has been in the politics of space (Pierce et al., 2011). For Kerr and Obel (2018), gymnastic coaches who had migrated from the USSR to New Zealand were engaged with an activity-space[6] (Schatzki, 2002) through which they practice their art form. This practice is the spatial kind of social relation, and its site of being includes the network of gymnasts and gymnastic institutions with which it is connected, the political structures of the countries to/from which the gymnasts migrate, and the physical locations in which they practice. Most importantly, the experience of place described in Kerr and Obel's study cannot be reduced to cognitive and sensory components. In effect, place is actual and static, while in a relational ontology it is also potential and constantly reproducing itself with every interaction. In fact, *new* spaces emerged through the migration of gymnastic coaches because this constituted the creation of new networks (or the extension of existing ones [Latour, 1996]). In sum, rather than focussing on abstract representations of place as a fixed scalar unit, relational ontologies attempt to analyze the relations between all of the actors (human, non-human, and non-living entities that have material and social potential) in a network, out of which emerges the concept of place.

Discursive

In discursive ontologies, 'sense of place' centers the intersubjective, or the multiplicity of subject perceptions. Discourse not only constructs the way we view places, but it constructs what a place is, how we can speak of it, who it is for, etc. Our perceptions are not the summation of our senses, dichotomized and separated from physical space, but rather our perceptions are the product of interactions that inform how we engage with space. We might say that sense of place here is less of a mental construct and more of a social construct, in that memory refers less to a self-conscious reflection and more to a collective memory or narrative. Here, memory can include 'post-memory' (Jones & Garde-Hansen, 2012) or national myths that contribute to the production of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983). The former refers to when a group of people is impacted more by a history that was experienced by previous generations than it is by its own time period. It is, in a sense, a knowledge constructed precisely *without* direct 'sensory' experience. However, post-memory can very powerfully impact an individual or group's sense of place. Post-memory becomes particularly relevant in ethnographic research, and in the case of queer studies, it often involves a collective and individual consciousness of queer history that includes place-based narratives (Escoffier, 1998). Imagined communities can also apply, however idealized they may be, to queer people. Baker and Beagan (2016) and Lewis (2013), who I discuss further in subsequent chapters, note how queer migrants are often informed by

[6] My alteration.

narratives about community and acceptance associated with certain places when considering migrating.

In their study on migrants from former Yugoslavia, Derrien and Stokowski (2014) interviewed those who had been forced to leave due to the war from 1992 to 1995 and had now lived in Vermont for several years – essentially having well-formed recollections of their home country and well-established familiarity with Vermont also. The authors' approach was informed by social constructivism, described in their words as follows: "The subjectively experienced world of an individual becomes, through interaction with others, a world that is intersubjectively shared; that is, language provides the fundamental material used to create realities that are taken-for-granted by interacting participants" (2014, pp. 109). They continue by justifying social constructivism as a theoretical basis for sense of place research because "language is the fundamental mechanism by which people come to know places" (pp. 109). Their methodology of narrative interpretation was a collaborative effort between researchers divided into three stages: Identifying place, establishing place relationships, and reflecting on place, which followed a chronological order. The authors note: "Life, rebirth, and growth—symbolic aspects of nature—also metaphorically parallel the refugee narrative (escape, arrival, new life). In addition, the narrative uses ideas of similarity (geographically, between Bosnia and Vermont) and tradition (then and now) to convey place meanings" (Derrien & Stokowski, 2014, pp. 116–117).

If there has been any common thread throughout these frameworks discussed so far, it is familiarity: familiarity as cognition, familiarity as a collective process, and familiarity as narrative. In this third, discursive sense, familiarity is preconditioned by language. Narratives draw resemblances between experiences (like the refugee narrative). Easthope and Gabriel (2008) recount the sentiment of one out-migrant from Tasmania who describes resemblance in their own sense of place: "You know, turtles pop out of the sand, run to the water, go for it, you know, head out to deep sea. And it felt very much partly that, I just had to go, had to get out of town ([Emily] 29-year-old, Hobart)" (2008, pp. 176).

In addition to the more subjective narrative account above, national identity is a mode of narrative that serves a collective identity. Lazarenko (2018) analyzed three prevailing narratives about war and displacement in Ukraine: the struggle for freedom, Russian narratives of insurgency, and geopolitics. These examples shape the multiplicity of individual stories, which reflect metanarratives:

> "Nevertheless, each one of the described stories – the metanarratives – becomes itself a specific form of discourse, or a form of reality, where people with entirely different backgrounds and personal experiences co-exist. So, these discourses are continually making an impact on the process of constructing personal narratives; they situate the personality within the context of [their] world and explain what is happening around them, specifically for the individual constructing their personal narrative" (pp. 558).

Migration decision-making is a common theme in sense of place research and is often motivated by narratives that the migrant internalizes. Here, a sense of place is not the sensory perception of an empirically given site, but rather the juxtaposition of (at least) two sites and their properties. Decision-making can be an empirical process but is not always produced by direct experience. Instead, it is produced by learned or perceived properties of a place, which the migrant is drawn to or from. Earlier iterations of this appeared as 'push and pull' factors in classical migration theory (Lee, 1966).

More recently, Janet Donohoe explained this process of comparison in terms of *normative power* which describes how a migration experience is often "measured according to the place of home" (2014, pp. 11). Memory allows us to draw connections between places and reinterpret them along the backdrop of our past experiences – those places most familiar to us and deeply rooted in our life history. It is this interpretive standard of the home that produces our relationship with place; however, it is also our emerging experiences that allow us to see our past with more context and that opens the opportunity of contesting places. This normative power influences tradition. Donohoe argues, "for some, tradition is to be adhered to simply because it is tradition, for others tradition is oppressive and must be rejected or overcome, and for still others tradition is carried along without recognition or acknowledgment" (2014, pp. 36). In this sense, even push and pull factors are influenced by discursive associations and are not purely economistic blank slates.

Finally, McDowell and Harris (2019) investigated urban expressions and perceptions of masculinity in 'dreadful enclosures', referring to the deteriorated material and social conditions of some urban neighbourhoods (their example being Goven in Hastings). The term *enclosure* alludes to the origins of capitalism in which formerly common property was 'closed off' to the public, generally those of lower socioeconomic status, and reserved for private use (Wood, 2017). *Dreadful enclosure*, then, inverts the concept in order to illustrate the isolated nature of these spaces that prevents young men, who have internalized external perceptions of their anti-social behaviour, from escaping this life. These authors stress the significance not just of the spatial patternization of gendered behavior, but also the discursive associations involved in sense of place when we externalize and internalize narratives about gender and sexuality.

In both the sense-perceptive and relational ontologies, meaning is understood as an effect of causes; a medium through which meaning is produced. The discursive dimension to sense of place views meaning as a prefiguration that determines the interpretive process (like cultural tradition). Here, meaning is just as co-constructive of place and 'sense of place' as perception and relations are. But it would be a mistake to construct a dimensional model where these ontological views are equal and exhaustive components to a 'sense of place'. These are merely tendencies in sense of place research that should be questioned to avoid obstructing our phenomenology. The degree to which they are present in my research, I argue, ought to be revealed by experience.

The discursive ontology, however, can be preoccupied with sociological and psychological significations at the expense of the sign as a 'thing-in-itself' as it is apprehended by consciousness. In other words, phenomenology might provide us with an attentive, experiential grounding that can be overlooked by discourse. I've mentioned how this ontology incorporates both attunement and intersubjectivity into its purview, but its relationship to the sense-perception is a particular area that needs more attention.

Synthesis or Dissolution of Sense of Place?

So, what implications does the above discussion have on my approach to 'sense of place' in this thesis? The epistemological debate surrounding sense of place still persists today, especially in the form of post-phenomenological geography (Ash & Simpson, 2016; Roberts, 2019; Hepach, 2021; Kinkaid, 2021; Pearce, 2023). Over the course of its historical development, phenomenology has challenged the reduction of scientific inquiry to psychological, sociological, and discursive essences. But in this development of its 'unity', sense of place has

become distanced from its phenomenological origins (Buttimer, 1976). This distancing is not exclusively the result of its empirical objectification but because of ontological assumptions about places and about our apprehensions of them. Phenomenology (as a method, not an ontological commitment) has offered a number of important considerations from its challenges to the above dispositions in sense of place research.

First, it is important that when we study 'sense of place', we recognize that it is a lived experience of place, which involves more than just 'sensing' but being, becoming, doing, affecting, knowing, learning, doubting, imagining, etc. We are not, in a positivistic sense, analyzing 'sense of place' as an object or unity, a disposition that is limiting to the sense-perceptive framework. Second, taking 'lived experience' as our priority, we must then recognize the multiplicity of lived experiences and of intuiting subjects. 'Sense of place' for one self-consciousness involves the awareness (at the very least) of other self-consciousnesses, which I expand on further in the next chapter regarding intersubjectivity. Third, it is because of the multiplicity of lived experiences of self-consciousnesses that place is an ontological given. There must be some shared awareness of place that conditions the possibility of place *as an ideal*. This involves material properties perceived through sensation, social relations, and narratives; these components need not be in agreement, as sites can be contested by competing narratives and relations and sensations. It is moreover due to the multiplicity of lived experiences that this ontology of place is not one of 'essence' but of deeply socially and discursively contextual relationships.

We've discussed how sense-perceptive ontologies regard memory as the effect and senses as the cause, as if we draw from our storehouse of retentions upon being prompted by the external world. But protention too must be criticized in the like. Merleau-Ponty explains:

> "When I gaze upon the horizon, it does not cause me to think of that other landscape that I would see if I were there, nor does that one cause me to think of a third, and so on; I do not imagine anything, but all of the landscapes are already there in the concordant series and open infinity of their perspectives" (2014, pp. 345).

Horizon will be elaborated on further in the next chapter, but of importance here is that memory (as retention of past experiences in the present) has a demonstrable priority in experience. And further, while memory and emotion often remain entangled in mental representations of place, their distinction is important. Heidegger refers to 'mood' and emotion as attunement, which is in turn *a mode of* being-in-the-world rather than a mental state or a subjective effect of an environmental cause (as in a dualistic conception of sense of place). Consequently, our understanding is always attuned (2010, pp. 130). As a queer individual, I have previous experiences with certain environments, and an anticipation of coming experiences; these are not merely memories of the past and expectations of the future but are rather a part of what constitutes the unity of the present for me. It might mean that my being here and now is anxious, but however I am attuned, I *am* always while I am in or out of place. And most importantly, when I am in or out of place, I am always in-the-world, where the subject-object duality dissolves in the inherent spatiality of subjects:

> "Space is neither in the subject nor is the world in space. Rather, space is "in" the world since the being-in-the-world constitutive for Dasein has disclosed space. Space is not in the subject, nor does that subject observe the world "as if" it were in space. Rather, the

> "subject" correctly understood ontologically, Dasein, is spatial in a primordial sense. And because Dasein is spatial in the way described, space shows itself as a priori. This term does not mean something like belonging beforehand to an initially worldless subject which spins a space out of itself. Here, apriority means the previousness of encountering space (as region) in the actual encountering of things at hand in the surrounding world" (Heidegger, 2010[1953], pp. 108).

To further elucidate sense of place, two influential geographic-philosophical works are of note: Anne Buttimer's *Grasping the Dynamism of Lifeworld* (1976), which borrows its titular object from Husserl; and Edward Casey's *Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?* (2001), which introduces the concept of a 'geographical self'. Both of these concepts—lifeworld and geographical self—have roots in Husserl's (*lifeworld*) and Heidegger's (*Dasein*) ontologies but contribute more rigorous geographic theorization to them.

Buttimer's analysis begins with Heidegger's account of *dwelling* or being-in-the-world. Inhabiting space, being *of* space, is similar to being-in-the-world, noting that space and world are not synonymous (Buttimer, 1976). As Buttimer suggests, and as Kristin Ross later elaborated, the naive practice of landscape description gave way to the concept of social space throughout late nineteenth century French geography (Ross, 1998, pp. 90). While Buttimer warns against the preoccupation of fundamental existentials that characterized earlier existentialist thought and seeks to reconcile this with social scientific accounts of knowledge, she does recognize the 'phenomenological purpose' and not 'procedure' of the role of pre-reflective being. Drawing from Husserl, she argues: "the everyday world, however, presents itself in dynamic unity, and it is experienced in a holistic way until thought begins to reflect on it" (pp. 280). And harkening back to Heidegger: "One must reject any scientific cause-effect models of subject and object, and conceptualize the relationship between body-subject and world as reciprocally determining one another" (Buttimer, 1976, pp. 283). If any fundamental geographic criticism was levelled at phenomenology, it was the spatial bias that viewed the 'ideal person' as a 'rural' being unaffected by place-based networks. This consideration is a key theme in the empirical findings of this thesis. Buttimer asks: "Could the gestalt or coherent pattern of one's life space not emerge from mobility as a kind of topological surface punctuated by specific anchoring points?" (pp. 284). I would answer 'yes', but would follow this with the observation that mobility itself emerges from embodiment, a relational gender and sexual embodiment that I explore in chapter three.

Like Buttimer, Casey sheds light on the complicated relationship that geography (and indeed sense of place) has had with philosophy: "Contra Descartes, the body is recognized as integral to selfhood, with the result that we can no longer distinguish neatly between physical and personal identity. Against Locke, place is regarded as constitutive of one's sense of self [...] In effect, there is no place without self and no self without place" (pp. 684). Evidently this critique comes from all angles and is by now well-established, but this is all the more reason why I've given such consideration to the many interdisciplinary perspectives on sense of place. I read the 'geographic[7] self' as a move beyond subject-place dualism by attending to the fluidity of 'spatialized people' and 'personified places' that humanistic geographers have particularly characterized. My sense of place framework is therefore not a totalizing one, but rather a holistic one that emerges when we examine a multiplicity of experiences of place. Sense of place *can*

[7] My alteration.

include any combination of a number of subjects/themes: immediate sensory qualities, memory, emotion, social relationships, material conditions, decision-making, narratives, etc. All of these categories are interrelated, and none can be wholly isolated. Sense of place is as holistic, complex, and nuanced as the self and place individually are and it ought to follow in suit of our care for these subjects.

What Are Space and Place?

I've spent considerable time elaborating on experiential space and lifeworld in this chapter. A note of distinction is due for the terms space and place, as these are used prolifically and often interchangeably throughout geographic literature. As Buttimer and Casey have discussed (see above), philosophy has often approached 'space' as the abstract, transcendental concept[8] which the concrete locus or 'place' is expressed as, or into which 'place' is subsumed. In this view, space is ontically and epistemically prior to place. On the contrary, Philip Sheldrake argued that "we come to know in terms of the particular knowledge of specific places before we know space as a whole or in the abstract" (2001, pp. 7). More recent theorization deconstructs this duality further; Marston et al. (2005), for example, do so in their seminal work by challenging the very concept of scale and introducing a 'flat ontology'. As sense of place researchers, I argue we ought to approach this subject without an a priori notion of 'space' as a precondition for 'place', and instead allow the phenomenal experience of 'place' to inform our ideas about either concept.[9] Consequently, my engagement in this work has preserved the usages of space and place by the respective authors or by the participants of this research, and with this said, I will expand more on the treatment of space and place within phenomenology and geography.

In summary, within geography, *social space* developed in response to landscape description, and in phenomenology, *experiential space*[10] developed in response to the previously dominant empiricist and idealist notions of space. As Merleau-Ponty described it:

> "I am not in space and in time, nor do I think space and time; rather, I am of space and of time; my body fits itself to them and embraces them. The scope of this hold measures the scope of my existence; however, it can never in any case be total. The space and time that I inhabit are always surrounded by indeterminate horizons that contain other points of view. The synthesis of time, like that of space, is always to be started over again. The motor experience of our body is not a particular case of knowledge; rather, it offers us a manner of reaching the world and the object, a 'praktognosia,' that must be recognized as original, and perhaps as originary. My body has its world, or understands its world without having to go through 'representations,' or without being subordinated to a 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function'" (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, pp. 141).

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[8] Kant, who Husserl considers to be the first to truly perceive phenomenology (2017, pp. 182), expounds transcendental space (2007[1781], pp. 61).

[9] In my research interviews, I used the term 'site' as often as possible in order to avoid conflating space and place as well as allowing participant perceptions to inform the ontological framework (see *Appendix 7*).

[10] Social and experiential space are not presented here as a dichotomy, but rather as the subjects of two (out of many) particular genealogies of geography and phenomenology.

For Buttimer, scale was only meaningful insomuch as it was experienced. Places don't exist at scales, but rather scale emerges as a *mode of being* of the lifeworld or the geographic self (*Dasein*[11]). Local and regional are not categories of place that we call scale, but rather things like rooms, cities, regions, etc. are parts of experiential space where meaning always shifts from moment to moment, from subject to subject, but which is also apprehended in a unity over the phenomenological flow of perception (time) and collective intersubjectivity. Buttimer, however, hierarchizes these scalar terms as "concentric layers of lived space", which isn't necessarily given in all precognitive experience. The *epistemic* quality of lifeworld, then, Buttimer describes as follows:

> "The notion of lifeworld connotes essentially the prereflective, taken-for-granted dimensions of experience, the unquestioned meanings, and routinized determinants of behavior. To bring these precognitive 'givens' into consciousness could elicit a heightened self-awareness and identity and enable one to empathize with the worlds of other people" (Buttimer, 1976, pp. 281).

Empathy prefigures the capacity for intersubjectivity that I explain in the next chapter, but what is important here is that our reflective capacity for space involves this empathy for "the worlds of other people." Additionally, it would be a mistake to speak of geometric space even within one of these "concentric layers" of lived space, for example in speaking of distance between cities. For Heidegger, spatiality involves two processes: de-distancing and directionality (2010, pp. 99). The former does not refer to nearness or remoteness, but rather the disappearing of distance altogether. Within my lifeworld, the being-at-hand of other things enables me to access my surroundings in ways that transcend distance—an obvious modern example being that of communication technology. Or, the "onerousness" of a journey determines my mobility more than the objective length of the path I take. *Spatiality* is therefore the region of things that are useful to us or at-hand in our lifeworld, and my being-in-the-world is always already spatial (2010, pp. 107). However, this does not mean merely a retheorization of space—it is a re-categorization of its very ontology. Instead of describing lived/experiential space (commonly *world*) which exists in objective/geometric space (commonly *space*), Heidegger inverts this ontological relation similarly to (though before) Merleau-Ponty and Buttimer: that "space is neither in the subject nor is the world in space. Rather, space is "in" the world since the being-in-the-world constitutive for Dasein has disclosed space" (2010[1953], pp. 108).

When space is objectified (that is, regarded non-phenomenologically), Heidegger argues, it becomes merely a "context of extended things which are merely present. The homogeneous space of nature shows itself only when the beings we encounter are discovered in such a way that the worldly character of what is at hand gets specifically deprived of its worldliness" (2010, pp. 109). Expounding upon this from the perspective of humanistic geography:

> "The sense of well-being, health, and creativity are ways of being in the world which are not entirely explainable in rational terms. These positive experiences are related to the quality and pace of time-space rhythms of different physical and social milieux. As long as I sought explanation in the differences between milieux, or in the differences in my own dispositions, many dimensions of such experiences remain opaque; person and

[11] Heidegger's term for what is roughly human being.

> world interpenetrate, and bodies, emotions, desires, and fears channel the data which become meaningful in our behavior before they can be ordered in our minds" (Buttimer, 1976, pp. 289).

Geography, after all, is viewed in its most uncontroversial sense as an interdisciplinary field that seeks to incorporate, if not synthesize, the various domains of the spatial world: processes and interactions between and across nature[12] and human beings (Buttimer, 1976). However, in doing so, geography also attempts to describe, without taking too much for granted, the phenomenal world. The apparent fracture between the branches of physical and cultural geography only exists within an empiricism that distinguishes between the fundamental reasons beneath things in the world and the interpretations of minds that construct a superstructure upon the real world. Merleau-Ponty recognized this in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945):

> "To return to things themselves is to return to this world prior to knowledge, this world of which knowledge always speaks, and this world with regard to which every scientific determination is abstract, signitive, and dependent, just like geography with regard to the landscape where we first learned what a forest, a meadow, or a river is" (1945, pp. xxii)

And it is in this spirit of Merleau-Ponty that Buttimer called geographers the 'heirs' to a study of experience credited to phenomenology (1976); an inheritance only recently forgotten in the discipline's history. Indeed, it is why I return to a lot of early work throughout this thesis in my attempt to advance new perspectives; and why I felt it important to disentangle current approaches to sense of place before establishing a geographical-phenomenological foundation to my research.

Sense of Place and Being Queer

Given all that was established in this chapter, how does queerness, the quality of being 'queer', figure into the lifeworld? How might we bridge phenomenal space with the phenomenal body, which is a gendered and sexed body? What we certainly can say is that classical phenomenologists, despite their lack of engagement with gender and sexuality (and at times, the body in general), were at least consistent in many ways with emerging perspectives on gender and sexuality. But more radically, queer subjects immediately problematize the lack of engagement that sense of place scholarship has had with embodiment. This is because our bodily being-in-the-world which phenomenologists have stressed is unavoidable for queer folks whose bodies are consistently in a tension between the perceptions of other subjects and ourselves.

I am not here interested in an etiology or teleology of gender and sexuality, but rather with their phenomenal priority. That is, how they figure at the forefront of experience; *that* they do is undeniable, but like sense of place, they are too often taken for granted. Contrary to conventional psychological accounts, I don't regard gender as something psychic which appears phenomenally (Rose, 2020; Saketopoulou & Pellegrini, 2023); rather, it appears phenomenally,

[12] This is not meant to reproduce a dichotomy between 'nature' and 'human beings' but rather an acknowledgement that the two are often distinguished in some sense. For Heidegger, "even nature is historical. It is precisely not historical to the extent that we speak about 'natural history,' but nature is historical as a countryside, as areas that have been inhabited or exploited, as battlefields and cultic sites" (2010, pp. 369–370).

and whether or not it has its psychic correlates is also a matter of phenomenal understanding. And, like sense of place, gender and sexuality are constantly in a state of becoming. Emerging perspectives on gender and sexuality coming out of feminism and queer theory echo the emphasis that de Beauvoir urged 75 years ago, that "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (2011[1949], pp. 283). In this theorization, not only does the acquisition of gender (and sexuality) apply to all individuals, cis or trans, gay or straight, etc., but it is never 'completed' (Hurd et al., 2022; Saketopoulou & Pellegrini, 2023).

The many disciplinary and theoretical approaches to gender and sexuality are difficult to grapple with, as their utility and coherence with phenomenal approaches varies. I briefly outline debates about how we ought to understand gender and sexuality as phenomena in chapter 3, where certain psychoanalytic and social constructivist ideas have proven useful and others less so, with regards to phenomenology and geography. Feminist psychoanalysis, and particularly emerging queer psychoanalysis, has contributed to new emancipatory ways of understanding gender and sexuality in ways that center queer subjectivities and narratives in their multiplicity (Rose, 1986[2020], Gherovici & Steinkoler, 2023; Saketopoulou & Pellegrini, 2023). It has contributed to our understandings of gender and sexuality being non-linear and non-final, always subject to discursivity. The adoption of propositional statements and practices is an integral existential component of experience—one which Heidegger calls fundamental. Pairing this with psychoanalytic and social constructivist accounts of queerness gives us a notion of gender and sexuality as "being-at-hand" for others (Heidegger, 2010[1953], pp. 81).

Moreover, the institutional and genealogical study of discourse (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1990; Srinivasan, 2021), in dialogue with phenomenology's concept of 'inheritance' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) allows us to understand spatiality (body, city) and temporality (moments, years) as broad scales of experience within a consistent framework that produces not only the unity of the present, but of a timeline (like a migration timeline or a 'coming out' narrative grasped as journeys with personal and progressional meaning). On inheritance, Merleau-Ponty writes:

> "Of course, I do not feel myself to be the constituting force of the natural world, nor of the cultural world: *I introduce into each perception and each judgment either sensory functions or cultural arrangements that are not actually my own*. Transcended on all sides by my own acts and immersed in generality, I am nevertheless the one through which these acts are lived; my first perception inaugurated an insatiable being who appropriates everything that it can encounter, to whom nothing can be purely and simply given *because it inherited the world*, and consequently carries in itself the plan of every possible being, and because the world has been, once and for all, imprinted upon his field of experience" (2014[1945], pp. 374, *author's emphasis, CT*).

Here is one of phenomenology's many justifications for why embodiment is so crucial for understanding spatiality and mobility, and consequently why my analysis begins with embodiment. We also return here to lifeworld, which geographers (Buttimer, 1976) and queer theorists alike (Butler, 2016) remind us is inscribed onto our bodies by their extension and capacity for action:

> "One may choose to adapt to those rhythms [of activity and circulation] on a conscious level and suppress body needs for silence, fragrance, privacy, or reflection. One may avoid conflict by blunting sensory awareness or mobility. People vary in their awareness

> of their surroundings and their capacities to transcend or master them" (Buttimer, 1976, pp. 288).

But people don't only vary as individual subjects. They vary as social subjects whose inheritance of discourses, identities, and understandings is often collective. As the subjects of this study, how do queer individuals regulate these attunements and sensations to which Buttimer refers as they inhabit *their* social space? This will be grappled with over the following chapters, but it is certainly an important question for further dedicated research. "The key message of phenomenology for the student of social space," Buttimer stresses, "is that much of our social experience is prereflective: it is accepted as given, reinforced through language and routine, and rarely if ever has to be examined or changed" (1976, pp. 286).

As outlined above, the present study is a phenomenology of queer migration because it centers and seeks to understand experience—that is, a particular category of experience. Therefore, sense of place (the lived experience of intersubjective being-in-the-world) is described *by*, but not reducible to, the intuiting subject (i.e., a phenomenological subject) who is also the subject of our research. This is the theoretical context with which I aim to situate my approach to queer geography, migration, and sense of place. The following chapter will now trace the development of the methodology of this work.

Chapter Two: Methodology

It could be argued that post-phenomenology has revived possibilities for the application of a phenomenological method to queer experiences like embodiment, mobility, and sense of place. This by no means implies that classical phenomenology is of no use for such a project, as analyses have addressed more broadly (Zahavi, 2003), and others more specifically for queer studies (Ahmed, 2006; Rodemeyer, 2017; 2020; Daves, 2021). It has also made its reemergence amongst geographic scholars (Hepach, 2021; Kinkaid, 2021; Pearce, 2023). I want to use this chapter to explain in further detail how I undertook my data collection and analysis, and what key concepts from phenomenology I have used to construct my methodology. It concludes with an overview of the participants.

Recruitment

Study Area and Context

The study area for this research was the city of Hamilton[13]. Hamilton is a mid-sized city in Ontario, Canada located southwest of Toronto within Mississauga and Haudnesaunee territories. It is situated on Lake Ontario and is bisected by the Niagara Escarpment, a prominent geological formation in the region. Hamilton has a municipal population of 569,000, and a census metropolitan area (CMA) population of 785,000 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2021). In 2001, Hamilton amalgamated with its five neighbouring municipalities of Ancaster, Dundas, Flamborough, Glanbrook and Stoney Creek, which make up the current city of Hamilton (Government of Ontario, 2021), and its CMA currently includes the cities of Burlington and Grimsby. Nationally, Statistics Canada estimated Canada's 2SLGBTQ+ population at this time was about 1,000,000, out of whom 75,000 were transgender or non-binary (2021). In Hamilton specifically, research from Mills et al. (2019) reports that 93% of trans people feel unsafe, and over 50% of queer Hamiltonians have faced harassment, violence, or hate crimes.

Recruitment Methods

Recruitment for this study took place overly roughly a year, between May 2022 and June 2023. It consisted of three methods: 1) Organizational outreach, 2) Social media snowballing, and 3) In-person engagement. In preparation, a research poster was created with the study details and contact information asking potential participants to email the principal researcher (myself) if they were interested (Appendix 1). For organizational outreach, five organizations that engage with and serve queer communities in and around Hamilton were contacted via email and asked if they would share the recruitment poster and study details in their online and physical spaces (Appendix 2). The organizations that agreed included the Hamilton Trans Health Coalition, McMaster Student Union Pride, Pride Hamilton, PFLAG Hamilton-Wentworth, and Speqtrum Hamilton. Social media snowballing involved posting the research poster and a corresponding script to social media platforms (of the principal researcher) and inviting anyone to share the study themselves (Appendix 3). These social media platforms included Instagram, Facebook, and

[13] Data collection included lived experiences from other places participants lived in for the purpose of comparative analysis. These places are listed under the section "Participants" as well as *Table 1*.

LinkedIn, and the snowball sampling targeted both individuals and organizations, among whom the organization TransCare+ also shared the study. Finally, in-person engagement involved myself sharing the study verbally with individuals I knew and met in person, which was often at queer community events in Hamilton. Those who assented to receiving more details were sent the poster electronically.

Because two of the recruitment methods relied on networks that included individuals I was already acquainted with in some capacity, a few of the research participants were known to me in either a personal or professional capacity prior to their involvement in the study. These participants were reminded of the social risks of participating in the study under such circumstances, even though all guidelines for confidentiality set by the McMaster Research Ethics Board were followed and there were no conflicts of interest. Ethics clearance from MREB is included in the Appendices (Appendix 4).

Upon contacting me, participants were screened to ensure they were eligible for the study (Appendix 5). In order to participate, participants needed to be over 18 years of age, self-identify as 2SLGBTQIA+, have moved to Hamilton from *within Canada*, and *not* have moved *to Canada* within the previous year. These criteria were meant to target participants who were regional migrants to Hamilton (regardless of their immigration history before this). Along with these screening questions, participants were also sent the Letter of Information (Appendix 6) and Interview Questions (Appendix 7). All potential participants were informed of the social and psychological risks of participating, due to the personal and sensitive nature of the interviews. Out of 26 initial respondents, 14 met the eligibility criteria and were scheduled for a remote interview; 8 respondents did not follow-up on the screening questions; and 4 respondents followed-up but did not meet the eligibility criteria for participation. These totals do not include individuals who reached out but were not eligible due to a potential conflict with my participation in another unrelated research project at McMaster during the same period.

Data Collection

The 14 participants who met the eligibility criteria for the study were interviewed using Zoom, during which guidelines set by MREB for the privacy and safety of data recording were followed. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked verbal consent questions, and answers were recorded in a consent log (Appendix 8). Each interview was audio and video recorded, and later transcribed; this data was stored securely using MacDrive and was destroyed after the study was completed. Interviews ranged from about one hour to two hours in length. Following each interview, participants were sent a $30 incentive by e-transfer (which they were informed of in the Letter of Information sent during screening). These interviews took place between May 2022 and June 2023. As part of the analysis (to be elaborated on below), I followed up with each participant regarding preliminary analysis and research progress, and this follow-up correspondence occurred between September and December of 2023. Of the 14 participants, 8 replied with their feedback, and 4 did not reply (engagement was unilaterally consented to but optional).

Analysis

The main method of analysis I used was an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA), which developed out of interpretive phenomenology and broke from earlier descriptive and transcendental traditions (represented by the writers referenced in Chapter 1). Due to its adaptation to more modern social scientific research, the IPA has increased in popularity in queer studies in recent years and dovetailed into several iterations (Chigudu, 2021; Gilmore, 2021; Huttunen, 2022; Ramdawar, 2023). One of its strengths is that it is effective with small datasets, even 'telling cases' of n=1 (Schey, 2021; Cutler, 2023), as well as larger datasets that are still small enough to favour intensive qualitative analysis, as in my case here. Relatedly, another advantage of the IPA is that while it can involve generalization to some extent, it doesn't rely on the importance of commonalities among cases. Instead, the focus is on applying theory and/or grounded theory to contextualize individual cases first. That said, this approach is highly adaptable, so some clarifications are necessary to outline the phenomenological and geographic backgrounds I will be integrating into this approach. Thus, I will explain the stages of analysis of this work followed by an exposition of the core concepts involved, including *intersubjectivity*, *horizon*, and *transition synthesis*, which are mutually constituting.

Stages of Analysis

Analysis was carried out in three stages: individual, co-productive, and collective analysis consisting as follows. Using the interview transcriptions, I first produced a short spatial biography of each participant, including a migration timeline, a summary of their journey with gender and sexuality, and their sense of place. In the second stage, I followed-up with each participant to share the summary of their interview, allow them to provide corrections or updates to information, and invite their feedback. The purpose of this process was to involve participants in the knowledge production process, both for consistency with the IPA and to maintain epistemic justice for the participants as queer individuals to narrate their own stories. Out of the 14 participants, 10 responded with their comments and/or edits. These were mostly minor corrections or updates to information, but a few participants had more in-depth clarifications to provide. Finally, using the interview summaries and participant feedback, I conducted thematic analysis across all 14 cases, using the analytical coding performed in the first stage. Each of the following analytical chapters was produced using this process.

Intersubjectivity

For Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, when a conscious subject apprehends an object, what we really apprehend is a *perspectival appearance*; in perception, this would be a point of view like from behind or above, which only permits us to perceive a certain face of the object. But the intentional object—that is, the object I consider myself to be observing—can only truly be known through the multiplicity of many of these perspectival appearances, either at different moments in time or from different points of view. This multiplicity produces a *manifold* (Zahavi, 2003, pp. 22). Fortunately, while we cannot view an object from 'above' as a disembodied 'objectivity', our perceptions are not limited to our subjectivity either. Rather, we can apprehend a manifold through the perspectives of other subjectivities. Post-phenomenologists have stressed the importance of *correlationism*, which suggests that subjectivity and objectivity "cannot be

understood or analyzed apart from one another" (Hepach, 2021); but this intersubjectivity has always been central to phenomenological inquiry (Buttimer, 1976).

In cases of geographic research, place too is produced by a manifold, and this is distinct from the ontological treatments I discussed in Chapter 1. First, because 'scale' for the phenomenal world refers to the complexity of the manifold that intends an objective place (for example, the town square, which is geometrically more or less entirely within my perceptual field, versus 'Hamilton', the majority of which I may not or cannot experience myself, and whose objectivation incorporates far more subjective perspectives of its inhabitants). And second, because various ways a place can be given to us have an equal ontological significance to phenomenal sense of place (I can *doubt* or *wish* that Hamilton is a queer-friendly place; I can *remember* what the view of downtown looked like from the escarpment; I can *expect* to find housing at a particular cost, etc.). All of the intentional acts that have as their intentional object the place of 'Hamilton' can be fulfilled or unfulfilled upon direct experience. On a timeline of one's migration journey, these intentional acts all occur in unique and potentially disparate contexts, but the relationship between the intention and the *perceptual* givenness of the object (Hamilton) will undoubtedly affect our experience and future intentions. This is why the temporality of migration figures prominently in Chapters 2 and 3.

Intersubjectivity therefore informs a phenomenological method by examining an individual's subjective perception as part of a manifold that includes the perceptions of other subjectivities in their lifeworld. As Buttimer explains:

> "The 'intersubjective' or phenomenological mode would endeavor to elicit a dialogue between individual persons and the 'subjectivity' of their world. Generalizations (the 'third person mode') should derive from a more basic relationship between the actors (first and second persons) within the drama of the life world" (Buttimer, 1976, pp. 282).

Heidegger referred to this as the being-with of my being, an empathy produced by my attunement (mood or attitude towards) and my understanding (reflecting upon), which are in turn produced by discourse (Heidegger, 1953). This is but one example of the complexity of sense of place that grants no priority to any one of its many aspects, expect perhaps for the fact that sense of place is necessarily intersubjective.

Horizon

Horizon might be considered the boundary of perspectival appearance. Husserl is rather clear that, at least with regards to the stream of experience, material reality and relations in space are secondary to phenomenological time (2017, pp. 235). For geographic research, however, we are concerned not only with the temporal continuum that characterizes phenomenological time, but also with what we might call the 'spatial continuum' of experience. Just as much as participants relay their stream of experiences to us as they reflect upon them, they also relay spatial associations.

Let us return to the concept of familiarity that spans the above dimensions to sense of place: familiarity as cognition, familiarity as a collective process, and familiarity as narrative. According to Ahmed (2006), "Husserl suggests that inhabiting the familiar makes 'things' into backgrounds for action: they are there, but they are there in such a way that I don't see them." This is why phenomenology, throughout its development, has viewed perception as the

recognition, even embrace, of *unfamiliarity* (pp. 37). When the subject perceives the mountains outside their city as familiar, it means they become the background to their everyday actions and interactions; interactions with other subjects who may or may not perceive the same mountains as familiar, but who share the same spatial horizons. As unfamiliar, the mountains, despite their spatial distance, become the foreground of perception. They may be consciously apprehended and reflected upon with intention.

The same is true of social relations and discourses, for which queerness is an apt example. Gender and sexual expression move to the foreground when they are apprehended by subjects for whom their expressions diverge from the 'normative' (the background, the familiar), either in interpersonal interactions or in a particular social discourse. In this way, the geographic self is the subject that lives in the perceptual field in which the body and all of the objects the subject apprehends are dialectically reproduced. Perception involves orientation, and gender and sexuality are always orientated; the manner of which determines the apprehension of a gendered or sexed object as 'queer'.

Transition Synthesis

According to Merleau-Ponty, we grasp a place in its unity through a *transition synthesis*. That is, each instantaneous appearance of, for example, a town is 'welded' together into a single perception, not successive perceptions (2014[1945], pp. 344). That is, my perception of the town includes retentions (previous impressions) as well as protentions (anticipated impressions). This transition from one appearance to another produces that 'unity' of a place, or 'synthesis.' Here, inheritance, or the passing into one another of experiences, can apply to long-term migration journeys that we view as a continuous narrative or 'large scale' regions (like Northern Ontario, as one participant observes) that we synthesize based on resemblant or discursively linked experiences with it. Be all this as it may, we still need to understand how perspectival appearance and transition syntheses apply to gender and sexuality (for queer people). To bring together many of the concepts in the previous chapter, Merleau-Ponty summarizes:

> "All along our goal was to shed light upon the primordial function by which we make space, the object, or the instrument exist for us and through which we take them up, as well as to describe the body as the place of this appropriation. But insofar as we focused on space or the perceived thing, it was not easy to discover the relation between the embodied subject and his world because this relation transforms itself in the pure exchange between the epistemological subject and the object. Indeed, the natural world is given as existing in itself beyond its existence for me, the act of transcendence by which the subject opens to the natural world carries itself along and we find ourselves in the presence of a nature that has no need of being perceived in order to exist. Thus, if we wish to reveal the genesis of being for us, then we must ultimately consider the sector of our experience that clearly has sense and reality only for us, namely, our affective milieu. Let us attempt to see how an object or a being begins to exist for us through desire or love, and we will thereby understand more clearly how objects and beings can exist in general" (Merleau-Ponty, 2014[1945], pp. 156).

Thus, the lifeworld (the unity of subjectivity-intersubjectivity-world) describes the collective of experiences I have had of Hamilton, my interactions with all those who have also experienced Hamilton, and the 'city' itself as it transcends its being-for-me.

To return briefly to embodiment, in response to dualism, we don't just have bodies, we *are* bodies (we may be more than our bodies, but we *are* nonetheless, to some degree, our bodies). And we don't only experience an external world through our bodies, we also experience our bodies, and we experience our bodily selves as part of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, pp. 213). We can understand then, as I present in chapter 3, how a queer account of my embodiment as 'at odds' with others' perceptions of my gender or sexuality are not indications that my gender or sexuality are *dis*embodied (that they exist apart from, or regardless of, my body and declare my identity thus also), but rather that my body is relentlessly inscribed *with* gender and sexual meaning through my being-in-the-world with others, and in many different ways (such as desire and love). But that meaning *for me* is what a phenomenological inquiry begins with, and indeed what sense of place begins with as the descriptive and interpretive experience of being-in-the-world.

When one perceives other bodies, one's immanent perception may not come with an interpretation of that body being 'queer'; but it does not mean the intentional object (the individual one's perception 'intends') is 'neutral'. On the contrary, perception is always given an interpretation. Perhaps I cannot see the body in enough detail because it is far away from me, or it is dark. But upon further perception, I might notice that the individual's characteristics are strange or unfamiliar to me. I might intend that the individual is a woman, but upon exchanging greetings, they strike me as masculine (after which the intentional object for me could become any number of things). Or, instead of one individual, say I perceive a couple holding hands, and upon further perception I notice both individuals are men. In each of these cases, my intention is either fulfilled or unfulfilled depending on new perceptual appearances, and an interpretation of queerness may come as an intentional act only after several prior acts (the perceptions of forms, then of gender, etc.). It is upon these intentional acts following immanent perceptions that discourse plays a vital role in intersubjective relations, as a subject intending a 'queer' person might have hostile ideas about queerness. And from the queer subject's perspective, it might be an earlier intention (e.g., a prior experience with violence) that gives to consciousness a person who might be hostile, upon which our shared social space becomes conducive or obstructive to my comfort.

This concludes my discussion of some key theoretical implications for the analysis to come, and they will resurface throughout the rest of the thesis. But one final note on methodology: 'sense of place' refers not only to a place but to a scale *at which* place emerges. If we are to examine the lived experiences of queer migrants, putting their voices to narrative, then we ought to allow their perspectives to guide the scalar limits of inquiry. This is not to remove all methodological rigor from our research; the migration timeline conditions the spatial limits of the lived experience, only this is a lateral conditioning (place as a situatedness, a being-in-the-world) rather than a vertical or hierarchical one (place as a scale or force).

Participants

A brief overview of participants interviewed in this study is present in each of the following analytical chapters; however, I provide a more comprehensive view here that synthesizes and expands on the information. Tables 1 and 2 compile this information below.

Of the 14 participants in this study, most were born in Canada (11); of these, 6 were born in Ontario, 3 in Alberta, 1 in Québec, and 1 in British Columbia. The 3 participants born outside of Canada were born in Brazil, the USSR, and Kenya. All of the participants had moved within Canada at least once before moving to Hamilton at the time of their interview. The most common city of residence among participants at any point was Toronto, and all participants spent either all or most of their lives in urban (non-rural) areas, and most participants (12) had lived in a metropolitan area before moving to Hamilton.

Participants in this study ranged from 18 to 36 years of age, with a median age of 30 years. Distribution of racial/ethnic identification was white/Caucasian (n=9), mixed race (3)[14], Latinx (1), and Chinese/Cambodian (1). Educational attainment ranged from a High School Diploma to a Doctoral Degree, with most participants having a post-secondary degree (12). Average annual household income ranged from $10,000 to $100,000, with the median being $40,000–$50,000. The occupational status of participants varied at the time of the interview, but included employment in the social services, healthcare, graduate school, and unemployment; most participants were employed (12).

Of the 14 participants, distribution of gender identities included cisgender women (6), transgender women (3), non-binary (3), and agender (1). One participant (1) said she was "pretty indifferent" about her gender identity, but that "for simplicity's sake, you can say that I identify as a woman." None of the participants in this study identified as men. Distribution of sexual identities included bisexual (6), gay/lesbian (2), asexual (2), straight (1), and undefined or "open to interpretation" (1). Most participants *additionally* identified as sexually 'queer', with some preferring the term over any others, and some even using it exclusively (2). All participants are referred to in this thesis using the pronouns and pseudonyms they requested during the interviews, although one participant opted to use their real name.

This concludes my discussion of the methodology, and I now turn to the data analysis.

Table 1: Comprehensive Table of Participants

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Age	Birthplace	Moved to Hamilton	Self-Identification
Lilith	she/her	18	Calgary	2022	trans woman
Sarah	she/her; they/them	24	Montréal	2021	bisexual; pansexual; queer
Sam	she/her	28	Edmonton	2021	queer; bisexual
Kit	they/them	28	North Bay	2021	non-binary; genderqueer
Olivia	she/her	29	Mississauga	2021	queer
T	she/her; siya	29	Calgary	2018	agender; gray asexual; queer
Rey	they/them	29	Brazil	2021	non-binary; transgender; queer
Nicole	she/her	31	Windsor	2021	bisexual; queer
Barbara	she/her	32	Simcoe	2019	lesbian
Gillian	she/her	32	Kenya	2018	trans woman; bisexual
Megan	she/her	33	Hamilton	2022	queer
Chris	they/them	34	London	2022	non-binary; gay; lesbian; queer
Sophija	she/her	34	USSR	2016	trans woman; bisexual
Marie	she/her	36	Victoria	2018	undefined

[14] Indian/Scottish; white/Persian; Philippinx/white

Table 2: List of Canadian Cities (Permanent Residences) Featured Across Migration Timelines

City	Frequency	Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)	Province
Toronto	5	Toronto	Ontario
London	4	London	Ontario
Victoria	4	Victoria	British Columbia
Mississauga	3	Toronto	Ontario
Montréal	3	Montréal	Québec
Burlington	2	Hamilton	Ontario
Calgary	2	Calgary	Alberta
Fredericton	2	Fredericton	New Brunswick
Oakville	2	Toronto	Ontario
St. Catharines	2	St. Catharines	Ontario
Abbotsford	1	Abbotsford	British Columbia
Brampton	1	Toronto	Ontario
Edmonton	1	Edmonton	Alberta
Guelph	1	Guelph	Ontario
Ottawa	1	Ottawa	Ontario
Sudbury	1	Sudbury	Ontario
Vancouver	1	Vancouver	British Columbia
Windsor	1	Windsor	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	British Columbia
[deidentified city]	1	-	Newfoundland and Labrador
North Bay	1	-	Ontario
Simcoe	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario
[deidentified city]	1	-	Ontario

Chapter Three: Queer Embodiment and Spatiality

Introduction

Embodiment has been a widely studied concept in queer studies which sees the body as an assemblage of several processes that produce an identity both as an "object and subject of culture" (Marnell et al., 2021; Lozano-Verduzco et al., 2023). Where queer scholars are concerned, this embodiment involves concepts like gender and sexuality (and how these intersect with others forms of identity) and emphasizes the lived experience of the individual (Cram, 2019; Chossière, 2021). Theoretical discussions surrounding the lived experiences of gender, romantic, and sexual minorities (GRSM) are frequently dominated by conventional theories such as social construction, which emphasizes the discursive nature of gender and sexuality (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1990). In building on social construction, geographic and philosophic scholars have stressed the significance of the spatiality of bodies (Malpas, 2018), as we come to know them not only through discourse or the internal world of consciousness, but through their physicality as well (Rodemeyer, 2017). Judith Butler argues that:

> "We can think about demarcating the human body through identifying its boundary, or in what form it is bound, but that is to miss the crucial fact that the body is, in certain ways and even inevitably, unbound—*in its acting, its receptivity, in its speech, desire, and mobility*. It is outside itself in the world of others, in a space and time it does not control, and it only exists in the vector of these relations, but as this very vector. In this sense, *the body does not belong to itself*" (Butler, 2016, pp. 52–53; *author's emphasis, CT*).

The body is therefore not only a site imbued with norms that reinforce gender and sexuality, but as "one's extended and differentiated location in space" the body also prefigures one's capacity for action (Malpas, 2018, pp. 137). This inextricable link between one's own body and others underpins what Husserl considered the *lifeworld*, which incorporates objectivity, *self*-subjectivity, and *inter*subjectivity (Zahavi, 2003, pp. 76). Lifeworld also constitutes a notion of spatiality that has developed directly out of phenomenological geography (Buttimer, 1976; Casey, 2001; Soja, 2011, pp. 120; Malpas, 2018). The intentionality of embodiment has been extensively explored in this manner; nonetheless, queer individuals experience embodiment in a unique way both because of how we are sexed and gendered, how we sex and gender ourselves (including how we respond to the former), and how we sex and gender others. But the pitfall of these debates surrounding queer (inter)subjectivity (whether between phenomenology, social constructionism, psychoanalysis, etc.), is that all of these intentional acts are assumed to occur *in* the arena of space rather than as individuals *inhabiting*, and thereby animating, space (Malpas, pp. 48). Further criticism of queer scholarship could therefore illuminate some ways we might better engage the discipline with theories of spatiality.

Transfeminist scholar Julia Serano approached one such critique, arguing that common framings of social construction by proponents and opponents alike are often guilty of what is actually gender *artifactualization*. This process regards gender not as socially constructed but as *solely* a cultural artifact (2013, pp. 117), while ignoring the biological (and we would include, bodily, sexual, etc.) variation that contributes to self-identity. Indeed, one of the contributions of psychoanalytic feminists to discourse on queer gender and sexuality has been to show that, contrary to sociological accounts of gender where the "internalization of norms is assumed

roughly to work," psychoanalytic accounts are somewhat exceptional in their recognition that in fact "most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women, if indeed they do at all" (Rose, 2020, pp. 90). Thinking through lived experiences with gender and sexuality, therefore, requires a critical engagement with current interdisciplinary debates on the constitution and perception of these subjects (Saketopolou & Pellegrini, 2023).

What we mean to say by this is not that we are proposing a new or expansive theorization of gender and sexuality, but rather that the reason this is important for geographers and research on the spatiality of gender and sexuality is that, just as focus on performance and expression (as in artifactualism) can ignore the role of the body (Halberstram, 1998), approaches to queer embodiment still lack greater engagement with space and place (Johnston, 2019). Indeed, what most of these approaches stress about gender and sexuality, even when the relevance of space is acknowledged, are the social/sociological nature of embodiment and interpersonal relations. But what phenomenologists and geophilosophers have demonstrated is that bodily experiences, in their apprehension of objects and their relations with other-subjectivities, are necessarily spatial (Casey, 2001; Heidegger, 2010; Merleau-Ponty, 2014; Malpas, 2018).

With this paper, we aim to contribute to theorization of social space and provide an example of how we might bridge the gap between geography and queer studies. Both queer and philosophical scholarship have engaged in nuanced discussions about transgender embodiment (Daves, 2021), sexual embodiment (Cutler, 2023), and the significant overlap between the two (Bettcher, 2014; Kondelin, 2014). Geographers have recently contributed to queer studies by interrogating the discursive preoccupations with theorizations of gender and sexual normativity (Vitry, 2021). In this spatial turn, influenced by phenomenological methods, we can understand gender/sexual normativity as a quality which allows one to 'sink into space' (Ahmed, 2006; Johnston, 2019). After laying out our theoretical groundwork as such, we employ an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) to analyze the lived experiences of queer migrants to Hamilton, Ontario. At times, we use the collective "we" or "our" when referring to the authors of this paper, or when referring to queer communities in general, as the first author is also queer/transgender.

Background

Narratives at the intersection of space and identity often have a particular focus on violence and survival when it comes to GRSMs (Ristock et a., 2019; Winton, 2022). While this is certainly a common experience, emerging social research on queer (inter)subjectivities highlights the nuanced and at times spatially fragmented landscapes of queer lives (Hurd et al., 2022; Reed et al., 2023; Rosenberg, 2023). On the one hand, queer survival involves senses of difference, homophobia, threats, and even suicidality (Dhari et al., 2023); on the other, it can include a number of positive aspects of community-building. In the context of small cities, for example, Reed et al. (2023) studied aspects of lesbian community-building such as in-jokes and knowledge-sharing. Lewis (2013) examined how gay men's migrations are a way they make *use* of space in order to navigate relationships more comfortably. And Towle et al. (2024) explore sense of place among queer migrants within Canada.

'Coming out' narratives themselves, contrary to mainstream discourse that casts them in black and white or even as one-time events, are challenged by autobiographies that recall the constant negotiation and navigation of queer identities throughout one's life. The formation of a queer identity often takes the form of what is initially a sense of difference complicated by a lack

of language and role models. Amongst older LGBTQ+ people's life histories, Hurd et al. (2022) noted that half of their participants "reported that the first words they had encountered for gender and sexual minorities were associated with pejorative meanings… The lack of positive language and frameworks led many to conceal their gender and sexual identities…" They further observed that coming out instead more often looked like "being drawn and pushed out" of the closet.

The ways that queer people relate to our bodies, and in turn how we relate to space through our bodies, as is well-documented in the literature, have commonalities that have been helpful in community building, but they also come with particularities that can only be understood from the starting point of the phenomenological subject. In arguing this, queer scholars generally turn to the work of Husserl (Rodemeyer, 2017; 2020) or Merleau-Ponty (Ahmed, 2006; Cutler, 2023), neither of whom spoke extensively – if at all – about queerness, but whose work nonetheless provides valuable insights for the subject. As Cutler (2023) explains: "At the core of phenomenological inquiry is the notion that knowledge is grounded in embodied and lived experiences. We do not perceive ourselves and our environment through pure consciousness, but rather through our bodily experiences."

Embodiment, Orientation, Social Space

Ahmed's seminal *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) reinterpreted sexual orientation to analyze how sexuality serves to actually orientate[15] us within social space (pp. 28). Extending this analysis to trans embodiment, Kondelin (2014) studied how queer people experience *dis*orientation which involves the discomfort they feel towards the "norms of behaviour determined by our assigned gender" (or sexuality). To this point, disorientation offers possibilities to approach feelings like dysphoria or cis/heterosexism as spatial relationships, because they can limit how queer individuals navigate even the most intimate space and also prompt us to reorientate ourselves in new or unconventional ways.

Hil Malatino provides a visceral phenomenological analysis of "being trans and feeling bad" through several dimensions of transgender existence as they link embodiment to the complex emotions of fatigue, envy, numbness, burnout, and even rage:

> "We feel rage and are transformed by rage whenever we sense, or are reminded, that the networks we rely on for survival are inimical to such survival. This sense precipitates loneliness, the feeling of being ontologically adrift, unmoored, homeless; it also, for many of us, produces suicidality or precedes suicide…" (Malatino, 2022, pp. 110).

For queer and trans folks, suicidality marks the far extent of our survival in social space that is hostile to gender and sexual non-conformity (Williams et al., 2018; Dhari et al., 2023). The spatial, even geographic, metaphors are prolific throughout accounts of queer embodiment: whether "*ontologically adrift, unmoored, homeless*," or the hypervisibility that queer people face, these affects are the flip side of the privilege that gender/sexual normative folks often have as they 'sink into space'. Eric A. Stanley examines this visibility further, focussing more on interpersonal phenomena such as misgendering as violence:

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[15] We adopt Ahmed's use of the term 'orientate', in lieu of 'orient', to refer to phenomenal orientation *(Ahmed, 2006)*.

> "Being clocked, or being seen as trans, is most readily deployed against a person's identity as an attempt to destroy their/our coherence. Clocking adheres with the gripping force of catastrophe by recasting the violent act of misgendering as the ability to name the Other out of existence. Misgendering here is not a minor act of miscalculation but a way to reclaim the domain of gender and one's position as author for those who are most threatened by its fragility" (2021, pp. 86).

In his analysis of anti-trans/queer violence, Stanley describes in distressing detail the "spectacular murders" of queer people (often queer people of colour), combined with "the quotidian desires for destruction, including the sterilizing glares that rob one of the ability to sink into comfort" (2021, pp. 24). This recurring illustrative device—sinking into space—suggests that normative genders and sexualities don't exist *in* space but are rather part of the very terrain of social space—a homogenizing, normalizing terrain. The geographic and phenomenological dissolution of subject/object dualism (Merleau-Ponty, 2014; Malpas, 2018, pp. 48) provides us with a spatialization of queerness that the empirical data and historical research therefore substantiate.

It is of no coincidence then that Kristin Ross (2008) argued for the "emergence of social space" through *revolutionary* space such as the Paris Commune (including its 'homosexual subculture' [pp. 135]), contributing to the rethinking of "space as social space, not landscape" (pp. 90). This social space is one of the important contributions of geographers to critiques of classical phenomenology (Soja, 2011). The theme of not only social space but of the 'spatial privilege' that conditions its field of visibility, runs through the course of history. One can see this current through queer liberation movements in the West; the Compton's Cafeteria and Stonewall Riots (the most well-known[16]) were ultimately a response to police brutality of individuals who were gender/sexually non-conforming (Stryker & Sullivan, 2016; Gill-Peterson, 2024). After all, the state and society's ability to enforce laws about crossdressing ultimately rested on a specific social space produced with the ability of certain individuals to blend in, to 'sink into space'.

Mobility, Motility, and Horizon

It is here important to stress that sinking into space is not metaphorical—it describes the real phenomenological experience of *virtual movement*, which Merleau-Ponty (2014) understood as possible movement (Breuer, 2020) and geographers have similarly articulated using *motility*, or the "potential for movement" (Bolotova, 2017). Virtual movement is given to us through the field of perception that opens up before us along with the 'other'. Thus, the virtual is "a space in which the subject 'may' exist, a space of possible existence" (Breuer, 2020). In a queer phenomenology, the 'other' for me might be another queer subject or it might be a cisheterosexual one. In a field inhabited by subjectivities that one perceives to be the cisheterosexual, or in which one themselves is perceived as queer, the space of *possible* existence is significantly altered; this social landscape occurs in examples of spaces that are perceived as safe versus hostile for queer folks, produced by a milieu of significations that are coded in terms of gender and sexuality (Rodemeyer, 2020).

[16] Numerous other examples could be noted (including the Toronto Bathhouse Raids, Montréal Raids, Cooper Donuts Riot, etc.) which for the sake of brevity we do not expand on in this paper.

Motility then, as the potential for movement, is bound up with one's potential for knowledge through an apperceptive horizon of experience, or what Husserl called "open intersubjectivity" (Zahavi, 2003, pp. 119). My potential for knowing what is beyond the horizon, or on the other side of that object, is not only given to me because of the possible points of view I *could* inhabit through my movement, but also because of the real points of view inhabited by other subjects. It is this open intersubjectivity that constitutes the relation between spatiality and temporality; just as experience is made possible by sequential moments of my own subjective consciousness, it is also made possible by simultaneous spatial positions, which necessitates not only my taking up of other subjects *as subjects* (other *I*'s), but my recognition that a spatial unity (like a place) is only accessible *because of* other subjects.

We can now apply these concepts to what Zahavi (2003) calls an "intersubjective community" (pp. 138), which we take up in this paper as queer communities. As mentioned earlier, Ahmed (2006) draws heavily from classic phenomenology, albeit limitedly and excluding analyses of queerness such as that of trans and asexual folks. Due to the foundational position such a text takes in informing more current research on queer phenomenology, we return to some concepts from classic phenomenology (Husserl, 1931; Taipale, 2014) which may have been overlooked by the dependency on Ahmed's work and which can help inform further research. For one thing, queer communities, inasmuch as they can be posited as meaningfully coherent networks of individuals with similar experiences, engage in intersubjective experiences related to non-normative gender, romantic, and sexual intentions. Outside of these networks, or when engaging with subjects who are 'not queer', these intentions take on different forms and objects of focus—and these objects might be queer folks themselves.

Whereas cisheteronormative perspectives on queer lived experience view the lack of a minority's ability to 'sink into space' as a quality in themselves that is 'unfamiliar' to others (Felder, 2021), a phenomenological approach proposes instead to centre the queer subject who finds their own experiences to be "normal" but is confronted by others who do not find those experiences to be normal and take up the queer subject as a "pathological object." Urging greater engagement between queer and phenomenological research, Rodemeyer (2017) asks how the various 'namings' of that individual (e.g., gay, trans, etc.) "affect his sensory experience of his own body, of his body with others." They argue that this marks the limit of the phenomenological method as it encounters the discursive power of another specific subjectivity, not a homogenous group of "other subjects". With these key concepts of social space, virtuality, and dis/orientation, we now turn to a methodology for exploring the relationships of queer individuals to mobility and social space.

Methods

Breaking from the descriptive and transcendental traditions of the twentieth century, the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) (van Manen, 1997; 2014) has become an effective method in emerging research on GRSMs (Williams et al., 2018; Thorpe et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2022). Wong et al. (2022) explains that "analyses framed within IPA do not seek to generate new theory or generalizable constructs, but rather seek to holistically understand a phenomenon in a manner that intentionally attends to context." (Wong et al., 2022). This phenomenological approach uses descriptions from participants of their lived experience of a phenomenon, "focusing on common experiences reported across the data corpus while noting the particular ways these experiences manifest for individual cases, most commonly through in-depth

individual interviews." (Thorpe et al., 2022). We can therefore apply vital individual contextualization without forfeiting the larger picture of queer community solidarity.

We interviewed 14 self-identified queer individuals who had all moved to Hamilton between 2016 and 2022. Individuals were recruited using three methods: social media, organizational outreach, and in-person engagement through local queer groups and events. Interviews were conducted between May of 2022 and June of 2023, although the majority were conducted in 2022. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted interviews over Zoom; they lasted between 1 and 2 hours, were audio and video recorded, and subsequently transcribed. These participants were reminded of the social risks of participating in this study under such circumstances, even though the guidelines for confidentiality set by the [BLINDED] Research Ethics Board were followed. All participants were informed of the social and psychological risks of participating, due to the personal and sensitive nature of the interviews. All participants are referred to in this paper using the pronouns and pseudonyms they requested during the interviews, although one participant opted to use their real name.

Analysis then consisted of three phases: in step with the IPA, and because of the importance of participant involvement, we analyzed individual narratives first, conducting a spatial biography for each. We then conducted follow-up correspondence with all participants by email between 12 and 18 months later, the purpose of which was to allow participants the option to collaborate in the knowledge production process with their own narratives. 10 out of 14 participants responded via email with their comments and edits, and 1 of these participants also followed-up via phone to provide an update on their perspective one year later. Finally, with individual context and participant verification, we engaged in comparative analysis across cases to find overarching themes. We present our discussion of the results in the manner of this final phase of analysis by the themes found.

Participants in this study ranged from 18 to 36 years of age. Distribution of ethnic identification was white/Caucasian (n=9), mixed race (3), Latinx (1), and Chinese/Cambodian (1). Most participants had a post-secondary degree (12); median annual household income was $40–$50 thousand; and at the time of the interview, most participants were employed (12). Distribution of gender identities included cisgender women (7), transgender women (3), non-binary (3), and agender (1). None of the participants in this study identified as men. Distribution of sexual identities included bisexual (6), gay/lesbian (2), asexual (2), straight (1), and undefined (1). Most participants additionally identified as sexually 'queer' (8).

Results

Across our interviews with queer Hamiltonians, we uncovered four themes that constitute a spatial phenomenology of queerness: *1) Embodiment, 2) Non-physical Violence, 3) In/Visibility,* and *4) Disorientation.* These themes emerged from questions about space and place, such as how gender and sexuality are framed or spoken about in certain places, or places in which participants feel comfortable or uncomfortable. Applying an open-intersubjective understanding to embodiment, we discuss how individuals perceive themselves as both embodied subjects and objects who, as queer, are regarded uniquely as objects in others' perceptual fields (what we call cisheteronormative space). While most participants spoke about disparate instances of physical violence, non-physical violence (be it social, psychic, sexual, etc.) encompasses several different experiences that are analyzed using interpretive phenomenology. Related to but distinct from these first two themes, in/visibility also prefigures how we navigate

space, but in ways that might be overlooked as subtle or even regarded as merely matters of discursive power. And finally, we understand orientation as a constant active process whereby queer individuals, through intersubjective perception, find themselves feeling out of place (disorientation), or finding their place (reorientation).

Embodiments of Gender and Sexuality

Phenomenology commonly begins with an oriented consciousness, and therefore with embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Ahmed, 2006, pp. 27; Cutler, 2023). It was for this reason that each interview began with a conversation on gender, sexual orientation, and expression. Many of the participants in this study described an awareness of their bodies as they appeared to the people around them, as well as a perception of themselves, in relation to gender. What we discover among these understandings of embodiment is that intersubjective perception is constituted by an affective 'milieu' that can be regarded as space, and is, in particular, a social space, due to the intentions one sustains towards their surroundings. Embodiment therefore describes the dialectic of perception Merleau-Ponty emphasized: "To say that I have a body is thus a way of saying that I can be seen as an object and that I seek to be seen as a subject" (2014, pp. 170). When asked how participants understand their gender and sexuality, this dialectic was commonly present:

> "[B]eing a woman is something that has been done to me, but I don't really feel anything on the inside… For simplicity's sake, you can say that I identify as a woman." ~ *Sam, 28, queer*

> "I don't feel like a woman. I've never lived in this body as a woman or a girl." ~ *T, 29, agender/asexual*

These conflicting perceptions were described by participants to be dialectical; the individual finds herself apprehending herself as an object and also responding to the way other individuals apprehend her, which may not align. But this apprehension is more than merely the "internalization" [or projection] of norms (Rose, 2020), for that would mean reduction to an internal psychic world or even an abstract discursive one. The individual's objectivation presupposes not only their own subjectivity but an intricate intersubjectivity. With phenomenology, we might view cissexism and heterosexism as perceptual lenses; specifically, as descriptions or characterizations of the relationship between *hyletic* data[17] (the other body, prior to any intention of 'queerness') and *intentional act*[18] (the expectation of that individual being queer or not; the *ideal* object). But discursive power enables us to further understand this relationship as a tool through which normative modes of gender and sexuality are maintained.

Taking gender and sexuality as orientations (normative being 'upright' or 'correct' orientations, and non-normative being 'queer' orientations), the way they are apprehended by subjects involves being orientated towards or away from, in line with or misaligned with, other objects. One young woman recounted the way gender and sexuality were 'orientated' for her :

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[17] We adopt Husserl's concepts of 'hyle' and 'intention' *(Zahavi, 2003; Husserl, 2017).*
[18] *Ibid.*

> "… So, I'm not out to my parents. Um, and so there's always little frustrations of the assumption that I'm straight and that I'll marry a man."
> [...]
> "… Growing up in my household we didn't talk about sex. We definitely didn't talk about gender expression and identity and sexuality. Like, it was assumed that we were all straight, like young girls that would [eventually] turn into women." ~ *Sarah, 24, bisexual*

In Sarah's case and others, the orientating of an individual not only objectivated[19] the individual but directed this expectation towards another intentional object; not yet real but which would be a necessary component of this objectivation (…*that I'll marry a man*). Drawing from Husserl (2017), this anticipation by one's parents would be negated upon them, for example, marrying a woman or perhaps even 'coming out', the outcomes of which vary greatly from person to person.

In certain memories of embodiment, our participants referred to individuals and places not as determinate but as agents that facilitated self-discovery and/or expression, similar to what Ahmed (2006) and Malpas (2018) understand as backgrounds or contexts for action. One young trans woman described her own transition and certain 'coming out' moments in a metaphor of "crawling my way out" and "carving out this name as Lilith" (*Lilith, 18, transgender*). While certain individuals had helped her along her journey, Lilith ultimately found herself "standing on her own two feet." It was ultimately this agency, underpinned by the familiar logistics of moves between cities and navigating relationships, that played a formative role not only in her identity but in the way she could be apprehended in the social landscape of other-subjectivities.

For many of our participants, not only were gender and sexuality thoroughly entwined, but they were also not always concretely 'given' as objects to one's perception of themselves. Chris (*34, queer/non-binary*) commented that they "came out to other people before I came out to myself." The seeming contradiction here can be understood as describing a kind of non-linear and fragmented embodiment, as an individual expresses themselves to others with their "speech, desire, and mobility" (Butler, 2016, pp. 52–53), while doubting this expression themselves. The intentional act of doubt, in Chris' case, involved the internalization of being "attention-seeking" and "lying." Here, discourse (like that influenced by the narratives reinforced about queer people) is a stark reminder of the reality of embodiment: "the body does not belong to itself" (Butler, 2016).

On 'Non-Physical' Violence

To talk about violence is to invoke an apprehension of one's body as an object to others, and one that can be infringed upon; while physical assault and/or threats did come up in some interviews, we focus here on the importance of the non-physical. In public social spaces, participants frequently cited instances of feeling watched, spoken about amongst others, or even being questioned directly, all for their perceived queerness. When accompanied by the fear that verbal comments or stares might escalate into physical assault, these examples alone are enough to prevent comfort. As Sophija recounted after transitioning, "spaces became immediately about calculating where do I put my emotional labor? What do I do with a transphobic student that tries

[19] We use the term 'objectivate' in lieu of 'objectify' to differentiate their common usages in phenomenology versus discourse analysis.

to misgender me in the classroom?" (*Sophija, 34, bisexual/transgender*). Like the classroom, the list of spaces in which participants felt uncomfortable or unsafe was diverse, from churches to Downtown Hamilton. The following account contrasts spaces like downtown Hamilton with smaller towns:

> "In a small town I feel the judgement. I feel people like, you know, um… you get the sour glances and things that I feel like, for the most part, you're safer and people wouldn't out right physically attack you or say something really horrible. Because people are—people know each other, right? And if you do that, you're going to affect yourself socially. You're going to—like, some people are not going to be on board with you being a giant bigot or attacking a couple girls for holding hands." ~ *Barbara, 32, lesbian*

Social space has a self-regulatory function in the perspective horizons of subjects that confront one another, given in part by the knowledge of potential surroundings, and the potential perceptions of other-subjectivities. But attacks on queer people, even when targeted for their perceived queerness, obscure the reality that many of them are already concealing to some degree their authentic selves in order to achieve some level of safety. Barbara asked an important question after discussing her experiences with anti-queer violence: "If that kind of attack happens unprovoked, what will happen if I am more loudly myself?"

Other instances of non-physical violence participants cited included transphobic remarks on the street, notes carved into lockers, pictures being taken of them in public, being stared at/watched, being kicked out of venues, and various threats of physical violence. For instances that were not explicitly directed at perceived queerness, participants interpreted this perception as their motivation based on previous experiences. But at the same time, and perhaps more telling, was the reluctance to label some of these instances as 'discrimination'. This doesn't mean that participants didn't feel strong negative emotions as a result; being the target of sexualized, homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic comments felt uncomfortable, invasive, unsafe, and "pretty gross" (*Nicole, 31, bisexual/queer*). Examples of the comments that participants received varied from slurs to threats and condemnations:

> "There was an instance when I was living in Newfoundland where an elderly woman picked up on that I wasn't, um, straight, and said some things, some Bible-y things about me going to hell [laughing], which was unprovoked, but okay lady. […] I mean, I've never really felt especially safe holding hands with my partner or anything" ~ *Barbara*

It is important, however, not to obscure the intersectional positions at play in these experiences of queerphobia. Lilith explained that there is a particular sexualization of Asian women in media, and she sees this reproduced in social encounters; indeed, she had been on the receiving end of comments that targeted both her race and gender. Hypervisibility was a frequent feeling/concern for transfeminine participants in particular; all of whom were able to compare their sense of safety and attention before and after they transitioned, throughout which the way others perceived them noticeably changed. We expand on this theme in the next section.

Jules Gill-Peterson describes the process of trans-feminization, by which individuals are perceived by others as, or assumed to be, transfeminine or trans women, often in the service of violence. The act of perception in this case serves to construct the 'other' as an object known to the perceiver first. Consequently, transmisogyny is understood to affect not only trans women/trans feminine people but anyone who is trans*feminized* (Gill-Peterson, 2024, pp. 18).

This was the process at work in cases discussed in our interviews whether the individuals' transness was 'known' or not. Stanley calls this the 'double bind' of recognition: that the same visibility which brings you into the world can also take you out of it (2021, pp. 86). We can understand a similar process of 'homosexualization' based on how individuals present themselves, with or without mention of their sexuality. One participant described her experience of being 'clocked' as queer before even coming out:

> "When I was younger and I was in high school, before I really identified as anything, a lot of my teachers thought that I was a lesbian and would ask me that. Um, [laughing], which I know sounds like a really inappropriate question. They were teachers that I had a close enough relationship with, because yeah, they were just, sort of, you know, adults who were checking on me, and knew that I wasn't having a good time in high school. So, I remember a couple of teachers asking me if I was a lesbian, and I said 'no'. But I didn't really know why they thought that was necessarily. I think part of it is that I was like a chubby teenager and wore a lot of like, Dickies and Band t-shirts, and they just assumed, you know, a girl who's not presenting super femme is probably gay. Um, but yeah, I wouldn't call that discrimination. It was just an interesting thing that they sort of, like, pegged me as this one thing, and then, you know—which wasn't totally untrue, but it wasn't something that I was really identifying as." ~ *Nicole*

Clocking, however, obscures the intersubjective relation at play in these situations. When one perceives an object, they give it meaning by 'intending' it to be some way; that is, based on one's perceptions of an object from limited points of view (e.g., a girl wearing 'not super femme' clothing), one *expects* to have apprehended truth about a person (that they are a lesbian). Whether or not an individual apprehends themselves in the same way the perceiver intends, however, is another matter. The intention would be considered 'fulfilled' if upon engaging with the individual they identified themselves as in fact a lesbian. From a phenomenological standpoint, signification is only the postulate of an epistemic possibility, not its evidence or its product. But this process brings us then to the theme of in/visibility.

In/Visibility

The in/visibility double-bind touched on above inevitably figures in experiences of violence in all its forms. We expand on it in this section. Participants also found themselves the targets of comments about what might be considered more explicit expressions of bi- and homosexuality, like holding hands with their partner. In these cases, visibility can feel endangering, while in others, it feels marginalizing *not* to be seen. Olivia gave the example of people or employees assuming that she and her girlfriends are "just friends". But in this space between visibility and invisibility, the norms of gender and sexuality exercise a certain degree of coercion, through fear of harm and also through their constant self-reassertion, such as a server "giving us our bills separately" at a restaurant, or "on a double date with my roommate and his male partner, [when] they thought we were two straight couples" (*Olivia, 29, queer*) These, according to her, were not isolated acts of intentional discrimination, but rather the many symptoms of the underlying heteronormative structure to social life, including in Hamilton. And further, she found certain neighbourhoods in the northeast area of Hamilton felt unsafe more with regards to her race than her sexuality: "I just, I feel like I'm going to get hate crimed there."

Race and class in particular were always reasserted into queer experiences, and some participants felt more impacted by these positions than by their gender or sexuality.

In the smaller and more Northern communities in Ontario that Chris had lived in before Hamilton, they commented feeling like "the only visibly queer person." This sense of exception is more than merely a lack of social connection, it is a lack of intersubjective community with whom to familiarize oneself with a place. An intersubjective community differs from mere intersubjectivity because cisheteronormative space conditions the other-subjective perceptions one can engage with. But most importantly, cisheteronormative space is not given through the mere existence of other subjects, but rather, it is given through the *visibility* of those subjects—through *their* givenness to us. This is why community is not only vital for an individual's comfort, as if it is the space one sinks into; rather, a community of subjects actually produces what a place *is* for us through apperception.

Discursive power that focuses on cisheteronormative subjects constructs a relationship between subjects that does not represent the queer subject who simply navigates space comfortably but is confronted by the subject who "found out and reacted in some way" (*T*). From a phenomenological standpoint, even if one, as a queer subject, might not be 'clocked' in a cisheteronormative space, they might still find that they cannot 'sink into space' or feel comfortable. They might be hypervigilant due to habit, or they might still be engaging in behaviour that is atypical for their perceived gender/sexuality. Several participants, especially but not only those who were trans or non-binary, expressed feeling constant "hypervigilance", especially for their non-conforming or femme expressions of gender. Hypervigilance is a unique form of mutual perception; it involves an awareness (even fear/discomfort) of who might be watching you. Queer folks, those who cannot easily 'sink into space', are used to being the objects of a gaze, and this requires identifying and navigating places that are more or less conducive to this gaze. In places that feel unsafe, queer folks need to act "hard" or unapproachable (*Rey, 29, queer/non-binary*).

Related to this negotiation of visibility, Kit articulated the feeling of "wanting to be perceived versus wanting to just be… If I have to blend in just to experience a place, I will" (*Kit, 28, non-binary*). They understood their desire to travel to new places as one preconditioned by a particular kind of embodiment. Our discussion often circled back to negotiations between place and gender expression, highlighting the reciprocal nature between the two, which was expressed by other participants as well. But while some had the ability to make these negotiations—blending in versus standing out—not all queer people have this option. They are, rather, forced to be visible *or* invisible.

In our interview with Sophija, she discussed the way that queer expression can be policed while cisheterosexual performances of queerness might be celebrated or even engaged in for entertainment precisely *as* caricatures of queerness. In other words, gender non-conformity is prohibited from being visible but is granted visibility when enacted by cisheterosexuals. Let's contrast these two separate instances described by Sophija:

> "I think that one [place] in Victoria was significant because it's like, it was kind of like an activist site in the sense of like, it was a party, and my circles were very activist. Yeah, I mean, and then they threw what they thought was going to be called a "gender swap party…" I wasn't out [as trans], but I was so excited, you know, so I did the bit. I shaved my legs, got a beautiful dress, done the hair, like, you know, my face, my makeup and everything. And we get there, and it's like, so funny how telling it is how cis-het people

> think about gender, because all the women—you know, femme-presenting people—drew big dark beards, wore lumberjack plaid shirts or, you know, donned white tank tops, like macho-type aesthetic; and all the men just like, put in balloons for tits, bright red lipstick, it was like a joke, it was a character. In a way they were doing drag. It was a drag party. It wasn't a gender swap party, it was a drag party. But I went there, like, you know, wanting to actually swap gender, do you know what I mean? And I felt so awkward." ~ *Sophija*

Here, her distinction between gender and drag highlights the double standard of cisnormativity where in one case cisgender people are uniquely allowed to 'have' gender while trans people are not; and in another case cisgender people are regarded as gender neutral by default, while only trans people 'have' gender. And the second instance:

> "I was grappling with my identity, and I was at a conference in Vancouver. So again, kind of like that more academic setting, and there was a gay man there who was making fun of one of his friends or acquaintances for being bad at transition—if you will, presentation—because they had just come out as a trans woman. And it was nice that someone called him out. When he said like, he made the joke about the person being like a clown. And no one laughed, it was really awkward, and then you know, he realized his social faux pas, and said, 'it's not like I'm policing anyone's gender'. And I mean it was obvious, you know, he *was,* right?" ~ *Sophija*

It might be tempting to dismiss the second instance as a case of projection evidenced by instances like the first. But from a phenomenological standpoint, we are here dealing with two completely different manifestations of non-conformity. The object that the cisgender subject intends when they imagine a gender [performance] *is* a transgender person; to be gendered is to be trans and vice versa. At least, this is the other-subject that the queer subject, in Sophija's case, encounters. The perceptions of the other-subjects, which in turn inform their actions, serve to then prefigure the queer subject's own actions. In other words, a cisgender person can present themselves, in deliberate exaggeration and yet with safety, out of precisely what makes us unsafe: non-conformity. And yet, paradoxically, the social landscape that is created is one in which one must sacrifice one's queer identity in order to 'practice' gender.

In contrast to, but overlapping with, the concept of misgendering we might use the term 'ungendering', as Gillian does, to describe this phenomenon where trans people are uniquely denied the experience or performance of gender. She described an alienating feeling about well-meaning cisgender people trying to be respectful in "not assuming I was a man, but also not assuming I was a woman" (*Gillian, 32, bisexual/transgender*). She contrasted these instances of discomfort—being perceived as gender noncomforming—with other instances of being perceived as a woman. These instances of discomfort illustrate the intersection of being both transgender and a woman, where traditional sexism and cissexism both underpin these lived experiences (Serano, 2024). In Gillian's words, "It's the uncomfortableness that comes from people being unsure, or careless with, my gender identity. Whereas [the latter] was sort of like, because I am perceived as [the woman] I am now." Gillian's (and others') above experience can potentially be described as disorientating, and we turn now to unpack how disorientation describes queer experiences.

Disorientation

Violence in all its forms immediately prefigures the mobility and *motility* of queer people—as described, the *potential or capacity* for movement within social and geometric space. However, whereas motility is often employed in structural contexts such as regional or international migration, we argue that motility can help us understand queer gender and sexual embodiment as it relates to immediate spatiotemporal contexts. Concepts relating uniquely to queer experiences frequently employ spatial illustrations: for instance, 'coming out' or 'passing' are processes in which queer individuals use visibility and invisibility to navigate their social worlds but can also entail a kind of 'erasure' of one's authentic self (Goetz, 2022). Rey described their sense of self prior to coming out as non-binary as being 'confined' to a limited view of themself, while Megan noted: "…[I'm] more comfortable in my own skin [now]. Battling some, you know, internal[ized] homophobia being raised in the Catholic Church, and just what that could look like for me" (*Megan, 33, queer).* In some cases, safety, comfort, and acceptance can be achieved (for the individual) by *making* oneself more or less visible; in other cases, one might 'come out' *because* they feel safe enough to do so. These are all ways that queer subjects reorient themselves in their social landscape.

But these landscapes are always fluid; visibility is never entirely in one's control, and modes of being like 'coming out' might also shift depending on what spaces we inhabit, and who we inhabit them with. We might even 'come out' or express ourselves with different identities so that others' perceptions of us are more predictable, affirming, etc. To complicate this further, when we engage in acts like self-expression, the reactions of others may not play out the way we hope or expect (hope, expectation, doubt, etc. being 'intentional acts'). This fulfilment or lack thereof of one's intentions informs their behaviour going forward. For nearly every participant in this study, the sequences of gender and sexual expression varied in this way; a variance that causes queer individuals to constantly adapt and assess their spatial orientations. We can refer back to Sophija's question: "What do I do with a transphobic student that tries to misgender me in the classroom?" or Barbara's: "If that kind of attack happens unprovoked, what will happen if I am more loudly myself?" Sophija described 'calculating spaces' as a type of space that she needed to prepare to inhabit in advance; for example, noting whether it had gender neutral bathrooms and where they were located.

Reorientation involves a re-examining of spatial relationships that affects even immediate movement. To illustrate this, we can refer to the experience of Marie, who had interrogated her sexual orientation throughout her adult life, and by the time of our interview, was content to leave it undefined. While living in British Columbia, Marie got involved in Salsa Dancing communities that became a significant part of her identity. She explained a lot about the social dynamics of Salsa Dancing, and the ways it reproduced heteronormativity:

> "In the Salsa community, the man leads and the woman follows… The majority of the time, the really high-level males who follow are also gay. And so, a straight male might lead a gay male to dance, and it's usually like, fun and open-spirited, and it's not about sexual tension, because it's more about like, learning how two male bodies and physiques can dance together. And it's really an interesting dynamic, and so often it's like, celebrated and cheered for, and people are happy to watch two guys dance—one gay, one straight. And in the female role, the female's typically the follow and there's a lot of feminine styling and feminine body movements… things that are identified as 'coming

> in', right, more about the curve of your body and the shapes that you make; rather than the male shape, [which] is very like muscular and dominant with certain posturing. And in the female high-level dancing, many females will learn to lead… but there's not as much like, I would say that a smaller percentage of the females will learn to lead and the majority of times they will just follow… And so, the male and the gay male roles can intermix, and that's celebrated, whereas there's not as much space in the Salsa community for gay females." ~ *Marie, 36*

In a particular instance:

> "I remember asking a female who I didn't know, but I was like, *Oh, she looks like a good dancer, I'm gonna ask her to dance*, and so I asked her to dance and she's like "Oh, no, no, no! I don't do that," as if like, I was hitting on her and asking her like, "Do you want to have a gay dance together?" I remember like, at the time I very much identified as straight, and I was kind of like, "Okay like, chill your role." I wasn't offended, and I didn't get defensive about it. But I remember thinking in my head like, *Okay, like what's the big deal?* You know? *I didn't realize I was giving off a gay vibe*." ~ *Marie*

Marie no longer Salsa dances, citing the lack of a significant Salsa community in Hamilton, but also feeling satisfied with the time she spent in that community in BC. She said: "Yes, I love Salsa dancing. I did it for a long time. I am okay not doing it anymore, or I am okay doing it infrequently if the opportunity arises." The phenomenal experiences in Marie's story relate inherently to gender and sexual *orientations* in the most immanent sense of the term. Movement, like in the case of dancing, is often coded based not only on gender difference (*the man leads and the woman follows*), but also on a reorientating of these differences toward one another that interprets difference *as* sexual orientation. Where these differences are suspended in some cases, they may not be in others—such as for two female subjects. When other participants, like Sarah, spoke of explicitly queer spaces where dancing occurs (e.g., gay bars), it was more common for these differences to be suspended so that individuals with various gender and sexual presentations could be orientated in various ways.

We noted earlier that gender and sexuality inform how queer individuals navigate space at various scales, and most of our participants could speak to this range of experiences. For T, who frequently lived between cities in Alberta and Ontario, the latter had been the place in which she could best feel comfortable in her body:

> "I definitely feel more comfortable [in Hamilton], and so that migration, that choice to come and move places, I think I feel much more in my body. I understand my gender best in Hamilton, and I can express it and practice it and describe it and be with myself better. So, I think that is what prompted me to move or like what helped in the moving process was knowing that I could be in my body in the ways that I wanted to." ~ *T*

It was no coincidence that, given what has been established thus far about intersubjective community, T had formed relations with queer kin most notably in Hamilton. While mobility that accompanies a more accessible apperceptive horizon can therefore be reorienting for a queer subject, for others this mobility, at some point, can become disorienting. In Sophija's case,

gender transition 'shook' the assumptions of mobility and desire she previously had, and prompted new questions for embodiment and motility:

> "Did I actually enjoy travel, did I actually enjoy migration, or was it just like a status thing associated with being a cool man or something? Right? And, you know, I have so many memories. And pictures of cool places I've been, you know, all around Europe, and I can't look at those pictures without experiencing dysphoria… and regret. And so, like, all of a sudden, this part of my identity became questioned. And that's why this last [interview] question is very interesting, because it was like transition has been like having to relearn what I actually really want in life; what are my desires [versus] what was just the script I was just doing for so long?" ~ *Sophija*

Finally, Barbara's reflections on her migration experience return us to the theme of survival, which for many queer individuals remains the reality of orientation—that many places one encounters are not conducive to even bare survival. In Barbara's case, it was homelessness and homophobia that preceded her move to Hamilton: "I'd like to say that I came to Hamilton for the cool artsy culture or something, but no… I was just like, 'I can maybe survive? That's neat. Sounds good, sign me up'." This is, we maintain, what must remain at the fore of geographic perspectives on queer folks: navigating and inhabiting space is always already political, because intersubjective perception is always imbued with meanings and values. The construction of space acts upon the individual body, ceaselessly inscribes it with a materiality of sex[uality] and gender, and it is in relation to this body and the bodies of others that we find our motility and come to know ourselves as a 'Geographic Self' (Casey, 2001).

There are important insights from a spatial phenomenology of queerness that go beyond the theoretical implications. For one, community intersubjectivity demonstrates that not only does an assimilationist politics not advance queer liberation, but it fails to do so because it misunderstands what actually constitutes spatiality. We do not "sink into" a landscape of indistinct objects. We sink into a social space of other-subjectivities each with a manifold of perceptions that produces place as a knowable unity. It is our visibility (being-in-the-world), but more importantly our givenness to each other (being-with), that allows for place itself to have Being.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have advanced a spatial phenomenological approach to queer embodiment that understands space as an intrinsically socio-material landscape whereby perceptions and embodiments of gender and sexuality facilitate mobility. In this view, various forms of privilege and discrimination (e.g., heterosexism, cissexism, (trans)misogyny, bi/trans/homophobia) are neither the acts of individual agents nor the products of disembodied structures. Rather, they are produced by an intersubjectivity made possible by an 'apperceptive horizon' of embodied and spatialized subjects. Our approach is also useful because rather than prioritizing, even for queer theory, the behaviour and discursive power of straight, cisgender people, phenomenology focusses on the experience of the queer subject and how they navigate space as a field of possibility. We have highlighted four overlapping themes of this field of possibility: embodiment, non-physical violence, visibility and invisibility, and disorientation and reorientation. Our findings demonstrate the utility in revisiting phenomenological concepts to

understand GRSMs, and also corroborate the emerging research that demonstrates a significant interplay between gender, sexuality, and space.

One of the limitations of this study is its lack of male participants, who might provide valuable lived descriptions of gender and sexual experiences of place. The study area was also limited to Hamilton, and most participants had lived in other urban areas before moving to Hamilton. Consequently, there are no perspectives from *rural* queer folks or urban-rural migrants in our discussion. Future research should therefore expand on geographic diversity of subjects even within subnational studies, as well as include queer identities excluded from this research, such as Two-Spirit (2S) and Intersex people.

Chapter Four: Investigating Sense of Place for Queer Migrants to Hamilton, Ontario

Introduction

As an interdisciplinary object of research, sense of place has been studied in a wide variety of contexts and is regarded as closely related to other concepts of identity, community, and well-being (Eyles & Williams, 2008; Williams et al., 2010; Egoz & De Nardi, 2017; Erfani, 2022). Theoretical developments in sense of place research have included attempts at applying frameworks which often approach sense of place in specific ways, including its cognitive dimension (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013; Trabka, 2019; Lazarenko, 2020), its social and material relations (Bolotova et al., 2017; Berg, 2020; Felder, 2021), or its discursive associations (Pelzelmayer, 2016; McDowell & Harris, 2019; Di Masso et al., 2020); though these approaches are not mutually exclusive. Sense of place has also been the object of a diverse range of methods, from mental mapping (Gieseking, 2013; Lazarenko, 2020) to narrative analysis (Derrien & Stokowski, 2014; Collins, 2017) to numerical scores that attempt to measure sense of place (Williams et al., 2010; Agyekum & Newbold, 2019).

Due to the theoretical and methodological breadth of sense of place research, geographers have engaged with overlapping disciplines like sociology, psychology, and philosophy to understand it more holistically. Berg (2020) examined the influence of representations like the 'idyllic countryside' on urban-rural migrants, and through interview analysis uncovered a diverse range of modes of attachment across experiences. Edward Soja helped popularize the concept of *spatiality* in lieu of space, which he saw as emerging out of physical, mental, and social 'spaces' (2011, pp. 120). Spatiality in this formulation is useful for sense of place as it recognizes the fluidity and multi-dimensionality to 'space'. Sense of place then, is not another way of referring to 'one's senses directed at a discrete object-place' but refers to the epistemic intersubjectivity and ontological interdependency of experiences characteristic of the emerging post-phenomenological turn. For the purposes of this paper, we adopt the definition used by Bolotova et al. (2017): sense of place is "how local residents perceive the places in which they live, what meanings they attribute to them, and how personal attachment to a place develops."

The phenomenological tradition has been active within geography for decades (Buttimer, 1976; Tuan, 1976; Casey, 2001). Its engagement with queer subjectivities has explored migration and sense of place more recently (Lewis, 2013; 2014; Fobear, 2020; Chossière, 2021; Cannamela, 2022), but research at the intersection of these issues (gender/sexuality and sense of place) is still lacking (Johnston, 2019). This paper attempts to address this disparity and investigate sense of place for queer individuals from a phenomenological perspective using a holistic framework; incorporating sensory, relational, and discursive aspects of experience to understand how queer individuals navigate new places. We provide a brief overview of queer migration and sense of place literature before outlining our interpretative phenomenological approach to the methodology. We then present an analysis of the results of interviews with queer migrants to Hamilton, and what this research contributes to the literature on this subject.

Background

While the last decade of research on the migration experiences of queer folks has witnessed more robust engagement with phenomenological perspectives (Ristock et al., 2019; Fobear, 2020; Winton, 2022), there is still a lack of uptake from geographers in this regard. In

order to work towards bridging this gap, we draw theoretically from the phenomenological traditions of Merleau-Ponty (1945), Heidegger (1953) and Ahmed (2006) which emphasize the importance of place in lived experience. Subjects are not only orientated geometrically towards and away from the objects in their perceptual field but are *attuned* (by mood, disposition, etc.) to their lifeworld. For Heidegger, this attunement is a fundamental aspect of *Dasein*, or human 'being-in-the-world' (2010[1953], pp. 130). For phenomenological geographers (Buttimer, 1976; Tuan, 1976; Casey, 2001), this being-in-the-world ought not be regarded as a nested space such as an object in a container (or as we might extend, like queer subjects within a non-queer, ungendered and unsexed geometric space). First, because as queer subjects, we are shaped *by* space and *out of* space, including as queer; but equally because our experiences with gender and sexuality are always already a part of our immanent perception of place. We would therefore extend, for queer scholarship, Heidegger's inherently spatial subject (2010, pp.108); not only are we not initially 'worldless' subjects, but neither is space initially 'worldless'. That is, we encounter space through an ontologically primordial world that is already given gendered and sexual meaning.

Mendoza and Moren-Alegret (2013) proposed that multidisciplinary research on sense of place implies an "epistemological debate" sided by empirical and phenomenological approaches. The latter, as Merleau-Ponty described it, provides "no ontological guarantee" (2014, pp. xxxiv), and this is where the two approaches fundamentally diverge. Sense of place research often places emphasis on the uncertainty and volatility of the subjective world as the individual attempts to discern the familiar from the unfamiliar (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013; Trabka, 2019; Martz et al. 2020; Felder, 2021; Pearce, 2023). That is, in the phenomenological sense, understanding requires making what was once familiar *un*familiar; to apprehend an object in its unfamiliarity (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 37). For instance, Felder (2021) regarded the familiarization process as a 'regularity of practices', which produces the feeling of being in or out of place. And this process is particularly illustrated by the experiences of marginalized communities:

> "...being a woman, having a disability, being black, being LGBTQ, or wearing a veil is enough to prevent development of a familiar relationship with one's environment. Instead of appearing as a whole, for people who are constantly under threat or surveilled, one's surroundings may appear as a collection of potentially dangerous elements that must be evaluated with care."

While the portrayal of identity as "preventing" development of familiarity is one that centres the perspective of the hegemonic group, of significance here is that phenomenological research can, depending on the voices it centres, offer a rich perspective on "everyday geographies for those who are perceived to be, or see themselves as, 'different', [...] where social difference is understood largely in terms of sexuality" (Myrdahl, 2013). One of the first and major works to explicitly put queer studies in conversation with phenomenology was Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) which reinterpreted the concept of sexual orientation in terms of *spatial* orientation (Rodemeyer, 2017). Since then, authors have analyzed queerness from different phenomenal perspectives. Fobear (2020) conducted an ethnographic study centered on two gay asylum-seekers in Vancouver and their feelings of being 'in and out of place'; and Prest (2021) conducted her PhD research on LGBTQ+ sense of place in the Stratford, Ontario area. Our work aims to build on these emerging areas of research. However, research on

the intersection of gender and sexuality with sense of place is still lacking, which is what we hope to address.

We can return to Maurice Merleau-Ponty to understand what this research might look like:

> "The phenomenological world is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which establish their unity through the taking up of my past experiences into my present experiences, or of the other person's experience into my own" (2014 [1945], pp. xxxiv).

In other words, a phenomenological project attempts to incorporate these historical vectors and geographic relations of experience into the 'here and now'. But phenomenology proposes a more radical relationship than this; it inverts the empiricist assumptions within much of sense of place research that grant primacy to immediate sensory impressions (objectivity) and regard reflections upon these impressions as secondary (subjectivity), which Merleau-Ponty challenged in his critique of the world as "a spectacle… with which an impartial mind could become acquainted (1945, pp. 52)." A phenomenological 'sensing' carries with it important implications for sense of place research, not because of the semantic question of the term, but because of our conceptualization of what constitutes 'sense of place'. This sensing, which includes *simultaneously* the aforementioned intersubjectivity and pantemporality along with the impression of, for example, 'seeing' a flame, is what ultimately defines sense of place in a phenomenological project. The phenomenal world is one in which perceptions are constantly shifting in and out of focus, objects are constantly moving between foreground and background, apprehended as familiar or unfamiliar depending on perception, and objects are reciprocally shaped by their orientations towards or away from each other. What influences all of these movements needs to be further elucidated, which post-phenomenology can help us to do.

Towards a (Post-)Phenomenology of Gender, Sexuality, and Place

In the last decade, there has been discussion about the emerging 'post-phenomenological' turn in geographic research and discussions of place (Ash & Simpson, 2016; Roberts, 2019; Hepach, 2021; Kinkaid, 2021; Pearce, 2023). However, any serious engagement with 'sense of place' from this avenue has yet to be developed. This could be a result of what Roberts (2019) called the 'anthropocentrism' of classical phenomenology, but Kinkaid (2021) argues that the task of post-phenomenologists is not necessarily to do away with its philosophical roots, but rather to reconsider what constitutes the 'post-phenomenological subject' as opposed to the 'conscious subject' of modernity. What this new turn perhaps does best for geography is open new questions and avenues of research into sense of place and human mobility.

Important considerations this paper makes from post-phenomenology include deconstructing the subject-object relation. As Roberts (2019) asks, "are we not a particular kind of object among others?" Further, even if we don't abandon the 'conscious subject' altogether, are we not all simultaneously perceiving subjects and perceived objects? This distinction is what Kinkaid (2022) recognizes as the difference between subjectivity (a subjective consciousness) and *positionality* (the subject as an oriented and situated object). For example, queer experiences are a stark example of what it means to be both always already perceived as an object of difference and perceiving oneself in relation to their surroundings. These questions can be answered by a (not new) phenomenological concept, *correlationism*, which suggests that

subjectivity and objectivity "cannot be understood or analyzed apart from one another" (Hepach, 2021). Echoing Ash and Simpson (2016), the subject does not exist *prior to* experience, but rather comes to be *through* experience, the conditions of which are affected by more-than-human objects. This is one of the objectives of a 'phenomenological geography' today (Roberts, 2019), but our work in particular seeks to put these ideas into practice with queer identities by examining the sense of place of migrants to Hamilton through interview analysis.

Study Area

Hamilton is a city in Ontario, Canada with a population of over half a million, and located southwest of Toronto. It is situated on Lake Ontario and is bisected by the Niagara Escarpment, a prominent geological formation in the region.

Methods

Interviews were conducted with fourteen (14) self-identified queer individuals who had all moved to Hamilton within the previous five years (as of 2022). The interviews were conducted over Zoom, audio and video recorded, and transcribed. They ranged in length from 1–2 hours, and a $30 incentive was given for participation.

Recruitment and conducting interviews occurred simultaneously between May 2022 and June 2023. Three main methods of recruitment were used for this study: organization outreach, social media snowballing, and in-person engagement. In addition to the 14 participants that were interviewed, there were 12 who reached out and were screened, but were not interviewed. Out of these 12, 8 did not reply to a follow-up email to schedule the interview and 4 did not meet the eligibility criteria for the study. These totals do not include individuals who reached out but were not eligible due to a potential conflict with my participation in another unrelated research project at McMaster during the same period.

For the purpose of recruitment, anyone who self-identified within the umbrella of 2SLGBTQIA+ was sought for this study, and this acronym was used on all recruitment materials. However, it does not represent the full range of identities of the individuals who participated in this study (i.e., Two-Spirit and intersex individuals). Therefore, 2SLGBTQIA+ will at times be used when referring to recruitment, research design, and certain context-specific discussions, but the term 'queer' will be used when referring to the participants and experiences represented in this study. This is also the term most frequently used by participants to describe themselves in terms of gender and sexuality. While most of the participants in this study had no prior connection to the principal investigator, some were known before conducting recruitment, either through other acquaintances, through the queer community in Hamilton, or in a professional capacity. These participants were reminded of the social risks of participating in this study under such circumstances, even though the guidelines for confidentiality set by the McMaster Research Ethics Board were followed. All participants were informed of the social and psychological risks of participating, due to the personal and sensitive nature of the interviews.

Analysis

In the interviews, participants were asked questions pertaining to demographics, their gender and sexuality, and their sense of place; this latter category was divided into questions about their lives before moving to Hamilton, their move to and everyday life in Hamilton, and their current retrospective feelings about their migration decision. We used an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) that we carried out in three stages. Each interview transcript was read through multiple times, and a spatial autobiography was produced for each participant based on their sense of place, gender, and sexuality, throughout their migration timeline. Each participant was then followed-up with to provide feedback and/or updates. Finally, the 14 profiles were cross analyzed for commonalities among participant experiences; these were grouped into themes. The IPA has become more common in research on GRSMs, as it finds common themes while attending to the individual context of cases (Thorpe et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2022). It has been applied to particularly smaller datasets, from one (Schey, 2021; Cutler, 2023) to a few dozen (Williams et al., 2018; Miller & Ball, 2023).

Study Sample

Of the 14 participants in this study, 11 were born in Canada: 6 were born in Ontario, 3 in Alberta, 1 in Québec, and 1 in British Columbia. The 3 participants born outside of Canada were born in Brazil, the USSR, and Kenya. All of the participants had moved within Canada at least once before moving to Hamilton at the time of their interview. Participants ranged from 18 to 36 years of age, with a median age of 30 years. Nine (n=9) participants identified as white or Caucasian, 3 identified as Mixed race (white/Persian; Indian/Scottish; Philippinx/white), 1 as Latinx, and 1 as Chinese/Cambodian. Levels of education ranged from High School Diploma to Doctorate Degree, although most participants had at least a post-secondary degree. Average annual household income ranged from $10,000 to $100,000, with the median being $40,000–$50,000. The occupational status of participants varied at the time of the interview, but included employment in the social services, healthcare, graduate school, and unemployment.

Of the 14 participants, 6 identified themselves as cisgender women, 3 as transgender women, 3 as non-binary, and 1 as agender. 1 participant said she was “pretty indifferent” about her gender identity. All participants are referred to in this paper using the pronouns they requested during the interviews. Participants who did not choose their own pseudonym were assigned one randomly, although one participant opted to use their real name. None of the participants in this study identified as men. Most participants used more than one term to define their sexuality: 6 of the 14 participants identified as bisexual; 2 identified as gay or lesbian; 2 identified as asexual; 1 identified as straight; and 1 participant identified her sexuality as being undefined or “open to interpretation”. 8 of the 14 participants identified in some way as ‘queer’ with regards to their sexuality, with some preferring the term over any others, and some even using it exclusively.

Results

The major themes that emerged in our analysis include connections to natural and built features of the Hamilton region. Participants found overwhelmingly positive connections to greenspaces, water, and the Niagara escarpment; while in the built environment, they frequently

perceived churches to be unwelcoming places, and more generally cited class barriers like housing affordability to be challenging. Perceptions of various environments were informed by narratives on gender and sexuality participants were exposed to and experiences they had, which consistently reintroduced the relevance of their migration history and youth. Consequently, community building, which included queer spaces, events, and mere conversations regarding gender and sexuality, were important for developing a sense of place and sense of identity in their current lives in Hamilton. Participants expressed attempts and desires to form new connections with place, including sensory perceptions, as well as reproduce old ones.

Natural Environment

Sensory experience was the most difficult component of sense of place for participants to communicate. To reveal this, participants were asked questions about physical *features*, what subjects found familiar and unfamiliar about places, and what initially 'attracted' them as sites within Hamilton. The goal of these questions, methodologically, was to return to perception, as objects appeared to subjects themselves. To these questions, some participants had the least to say, while others even stated they had a hard time thinking of their answers; but a few were able to elaborate quite a lot in this regard. Natural and built environments were not distinguished in the interview questions, but upon explaining the wide variety of examples 'places' can include, participants tended to categorize their perceptions accordingly. Generally, participants were more focussed and detailed with one or the other (that is, 'natural' or 'built' environments). For natural environments, participants commonly expressed positive memories and emotions related to greenspaces. The [Niagara] escarpment stood out to most participants both as a familiar natural feature, but also one that makes Hamilton unique to other cities:

> "…Sometimes when you walk along the escarpment it feels like you're walking up a mountain. So, those kind of like, wooded, enclosed areas that make you feel like you're not really in a city. Like you have this moment of like, "oh, I could be anywhere far away." And I'm probably good at blocking out city sounds because I've grown up in cities. Otherwise, people would be like "you're ridiculous, you can hear the highway constantly." ~ *Sarah (24)*

> "I guess the escarpment is kind of a familiar feature because I was living in St. Catharines… it's a geographic feature that like runs all through the region so it was kind of familiar in that sense… On the same side of the coin, the nature of the escarpment through the city is kind of unfamiliar, in the sense of like, mobility and access between the two halves of the city. I think that's something that's quite unique to Hamilton and different from other places I've lived." ~ *Sam (28)*

Importantly though, (sense-)perceptions are *always already* correlational; contingent on previous experiences (memory) of the individual as well as discourses and intersubjectivities they internalize. These factors always orient perception for the individual. T, who grew up in Calgary, Alberta found the general reference to the Hamilton 'mountain' as rather strange, having had a different perception of what constituted mountains. She added:

> "Having the [Rocky] mountains as your background… it's like having a monitor, where like that's your wallpaper for your computer. Like having them in the background is… it's like having good company always, and that's like a more-than-human non-human thing." ~ *T (29)*

For Chris, it was previous experiences with water that informed immediate impressions of place. They told me that in Southern Ontario, they "have really struggled with the lack of access to water." Having spent much of their life in Northern Ontario, water was more than just a familiar sight; it was a part of their emotional well-being, a physical method of grounding them to their environment. Note their contrast between Sudbury and London:

> "There's still this rock that I could get to through the trails behind my house. And it's like, I can remember the crevices of this rock, like on my bare feet, you know what I mean? Just like the same way that you can envision the creases on your hand and like, all the little dips where rain would pool and like, where the tadpoles would be, and the different ways that the waves would press against the rocks and cover—I don't know, it was like this very tiny little point that jutted out into the water. But I spent, collectively, weeks on that one little rock… It was in the south end of Sudbury and my house backed on to a sort of a conservation area type place."

> "It's hard not to compare everything to where I am now because the water is something that I always found hard, when I lived in London, that I didn't have access to that. And then in Sudbury, just like, being able to walk to lakes and being able to like—even just playgrounds that happened to be on the water… In London I would go down to the Thames River. And there was a bit of sadness there in that you can always hear the traffic and you know that you can't touch that water because it's contaminated by, you know, that's where the sewage system exits into and there's all sorts of other runoff and stuff." ~ *Chris (34)*

For Chris, the geographic component was significant even within a regional context; they understood the ecological and geological differences to be vital in their connection to place. When Chris moved to Hamilton they searched for that familiar connection to water again, but found it wanting:

> "And then the unfamiliarity is like, I went looking for water to put my hands in because I thought, 'well, this will be grounding,' and I went to the Dundas conservation area, because you can actually touch the water there, whereas in some places it's all fenced off and things. But that to me, it was unsettling because I was like, you know, I'm used to all these conifers and instead there's all these deciduous trees and vines, and the rocks are quite different. So, it's something that I didn't expect it to feel so alien. And I'm still looking for that place that feels like, you know, a little place that feels comfortable… I haven't found it yet." ~ *Chris (34)*

Chris' use of *unsettling* and *alien* versus *grounding* and *comfortable* are illustrative of the perceptual apprehension of familiarity that is particularly manifest in the objects that comprise a place, to the extent that migrants sought out these familiar features wherever they moved. It

echoes the being-at-hand of objects that Heidegger views as giving world its character distinct from place—like the fresh water for Chris which their house backed onto, or the mountains that T described as having good company.

Three of the study participants had all lived in Victoria previously. They felt an attachment to the water and mountains in British Columbia that they had difficulty finding again in Hamilton. They all readily cited the same location in Victoria:

> "There's a particular place [in Victoria] called Dallas Road, and I often lived pretty close to that. And it's just like a nice long walk along the bay. Um, and then across from it are the Cascadian mountains in Washington. So yeah, that's—yeah, that's somewhere I would say I feel deeply rooted." ~ *Nicole (31)*

The view from Dallas Beach oriented subject perceptions such that it became a "background for action" (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 37), from physical movement to meditation. There was the place itself *from which* subjects were oriented, as well as what the place oriented them *towards*. This orientation that comes with 'being in place' facilitated recollection among migrants. Marie in particular felt that, wherever she was, water held fold memories and also allowed for meditation, because of that relationship she formed in British Columbia:

> "I think walking along the lake is a familiar thing. Like, you can kind of imagine it's the ocean, even though it's not. And it smells like a lake and there's no tides, but it's a big body of water and so, that sense of like, being able to look out into something that was beautiful. The light reflects off the lake into your eyes, and you can kind of just allow your mind to meditate without much effort by just looking into the wonder of the water." ~ *Marie (36)*

These attachments to the natural environment, whether obscured or reproduced by new experiences, reflect migrant aspirations to reproduce positive connections in their new homes, which often led to carrying routines and traditions forward from their lives in previous cities. We expand on the significance of routines in a follow up paper.

Built Environment

Built environments were represented more variably among participants, with a few notable commonalities. Kit felt that Hamilton was less gentrified than Guelph, where they lived previously, while Nicole noted a kind of 'emptiness' and 'vacancy' in Hamilton that differed from other cities they had lived in. Sophija expanded on this imagery of 'empty spaces', comparing Hamilton to the 'old Toronto' that she grew up in:

> "[Hamilton] looks exactly like Toronto before Toronto's gentrification and kind of boom. So, like it was what I grew up in, right? You know like, obscure businesses, you're like, 'how do you even survive?'… And just lots of empty spaces, a more centralized or more visible street community. You know, bad roads… There were people doing drugs on the street, but I don't have a problem with that… Dangerous dive bars, no fancy dive bars… Then the gourmet olive oil stores and stroller shops—the strollers selling at $20,000—came in, and then like, it's so cartoon-like." ~ *Sophija (34)*

Several participants spoke similarly of the working-class reputation of Hamilton, evoking the image of the "gritty, blue-collar" steel town:

> "Hamilton used to be such a steel city focus when I was growing up, and it's still very much the blue collar and grittiness (which I, which I really like). I think that was also part of the reason that we wanted to move back here. So that felt familiar. Some of the unfamiliar[ity] is that we're living in a very affluent neighborhood…" ~ *Megan (33)*

The natural/built distinction, however, became contestable in participant perceptions of 'smaller' or immediate spaces. Megan and T, for example, spoke to the importance of having house plants, for the non-human interactions they provided in the confines of the home. Upon reflecting on micro-geographies, the gestalt of place produced by the natural/built distinction dissolved into object relations that participants engaged in. T also spoke about a peculiar place that she often felt safe in—the bus stop:

> "I'm comfortable with my own body in this place, and so I can sit here and just ponder and reflect, whereas I think normally there's like a hypervigilance that comes with queerness of who's around you and why, especially when you're femme—I'm sure you experience this—where you're always aware of who might be watching you. And I think I'm so familiar with that bus stop that for me it was just like no one could interrupt me… I know the routines of this place. I know which old people are walking across to McDonald's at this time of day, like even if I don't *know* them right… The bus stop became a very safe place, but it's because I was born like, because of these longer attachments to why the bus matters." ~ *T (29)*

Experiences like T's exemplify the connection Felder (2021) makes between familiarity and safety for marginalized people. T's comfort with the bus was formed through earlier experiences, like realizations of gender and identity, and even narratives: "[My parents] knew that they wanted their children to go to university, and so I only had to take one bus that would drop me right at the door of the university one day." But ultimately, these everyday patterns of regularity produced a sense of familiarity with her environment that informed how she became acquainted with Hamilton upon moving.

Community

In the contexts of urban infrastructure and greenspaces, participants related their sense of place to their sense of self and identity. In this section we highlight how sense of place intersects with gender and sexuality, as community and language play a large role in this process. Finding community with other queer people in Hamilton was important for all participants in order to settle in after moving.

> "I feel really happy with my decision to migrate to Hamilton. Yeah, I feel like it's been a good place for me. Like, I've been able to develop some community here and I'm like, kind of looking forward to continuing to build that. I think there's been a period where I

> was kind of uncertain about like, where… well, for a lot of my life, I've been concerned about where I want to be, because I've moved so much.
> [...]
> I've been more interested in exploring queer spaces here in Hamilton and building more queer community… And then, you know, obviously like being in St. Catharines and like during the pandemic… That wasn't really something that I felt like I had access to, or like I didn't really know of it going on, whereas in Hamilton I find there is quite a bit in comparison." ~ *Sam (28)*

Two participants lived in Hamilton once before their current residence, and they noticed how Hamilton and its queer community have changed over the years since they last lived in the city:

> "There's a much bigger community here than when I lived here previously… not just like the university place; like, queer spaces too, and with the downtown core spaces. I've noticed that there's much more queer community here, which allows… or at least I've just felt like, more comfortable here versus when I lived here before—I definitely didn't feel like leaving the Mac area [before]." ~ *Rey (29)*

Activism was important for a few participants, especially when they found places isolating as a queer person. Sophija spoke to the population geographies of Hamilton and Victoria, and the difference this makes for activism. She noted that, while both are mid-sized Canadian cities, Hamilton's proximity to several other large cities can be alienating when trying to find community:

> "…When you're in Victoria you have nowhere to go, right? Like, the nearest thing is the ferry to Vancouver, which is like, combined with all the other travels, like four or five hours to get there… Victoria is a small pond with many big fish because it's a provincial capital. So, like all the decisions are made there in a small place that you can't leave. So… it was just a very alienating experience here [in Hamilton]. It's almost like I went from a place where everything was interconnected and everyone knew each other, like a small town of activism." ~ *Sophija (34)*

Sophija explained that activism was inseparable from her identity, especially in certain social spaces. Before she transitioned, she engaged with activist spaces with the sentiment, "I'm here to help." But as a trans woman in academia, equity is "more at the front of my mind." These motivations that transgender and non-binary migrants had to create the communities and spaces they needed stemmed from a highly personal recognition of their relationship to spaces (e.g., schools). And these relations (to others and to community) speak to the theme that queer migrants perceive themselves as oriented within spaces in which they are also perceived by others (often) as different.

Speaking to this difference, Chris noted that in Hamilton, "it's a lot easier to connect with people because I'm not an anomaly" compared to the smaller, more northern communities they had lived in. This wasn't only reassuring for themself, but as a parent for their children as well:

> "We went to this Concession Street Fest, and there were drag queens. And my middle child… he loved it. He's never quite fit in in some of the places that we've lived too. So, to just see him light up and be so into that… He used to be this kid… he would like to run around in dresses all the time, but he stopped doing that. And I think that seeing these, you know, even just seeing the drag queens just hanging out and doing child-friendly entertainment, he just lit up and he was so excited to be there. And he's already made friends, so I think that I need to like, kind of balance the community aspects of it—and how it might benefit my own kids, I don't know yet—but versus the things that are lost in terms of the natural environment. So, I don't know. There are trade-offs." ~ *Chris (34)*

The emphasis on community that individuals so often have can provide insight into a peculiarity in the sense of place of queer folks. Community was accessible in urban areas, particularly larger ones, where an individual could be apprehended by others in a way that aligned with their own identity. Yet the positive references to the solitude of nature – from Barbara's trail walks in Brant County, to Chris' exploration of Sudbury's conservation areas, to Sarah's feeling of ease in public parks – reflected both a safety and comfort in not appearing to others as an already gendered/oriented object; specifically, to not be subjected to the stigma and discrimination that came with this apprehension. It was this contradiction that resulted in relatively disparate feelings by participants about their migration decisions and their futures. In the cases of many participants, the natural and social features of Hamilton were therefore in a sort of tension: when larger urban areas for queer people mean finding community, affirmation, and material resources, it can be a unique challenge for them in feeling the need to sacrifice or leave behind their connection to nature that comes with living in smaller urban or rural areas.

Attunement and Accessibility

There were also spaces where participants didn't feel accepted or welcomed or were uncomfortable. Participants were asked about these places using open-ended questions specific to cities they had lived in. Barbara, for example, mentioned that where she grew up, a rural area outside of Hamilton, "just about everything was connected to the Church in some way," which was more than just a barrier to her social engagement and acceptance. It was a barrier to her finding a connection to place, because forming such a connection depends on its relationship to one's identity. Citing instances where friends of hers had been ostracized by their religious communities upon coming out as queer, Barbara "didn't really notice anything on the positive ever coming from Churches as far as being accepting spaces." The same was expressed by other participants:

> "…I didn't consistently go to church after elementary school. Like, we went occasionally during high school, but I remember thinking, 'oh, you know, there's definitely this expressed viewpoint that, you know, gay is not acceptable. It's bad, it's something that should be, you know, criticized under the Catholic Church.' And so, taking that in a little bit and internalizing that a little bit and kind of playing into before being like, you know you can be gay but it, you know, within a certain realm for it to be accessible—or accepted, rather." ~ *Megan (33)*

> "I actually got a job in [my] church over the summer [in Toronto]… like I did a summer internship like, caretaking for the church. And like, I remember being in a meeting at the church where they were talking about what they would do if a gay couple wanted to get married there, and how they could like, deflect that. Like, strategizing [about] not letting gay people get married in the church." ~ *Gillian (32)*

While many participants cited instances in churches when they were much younger or lived in different places, these stories—whether direct experiences or not—made them uncomfortable in the long-term about returning, becoming imprinted with associations on their sense of place as sites of risk, even now living in Hamilton.

Participants experienced a range of stigmatizing and discriminating behaviours in the places they lived. In many cases, this resulted in having to avoid, or be more cautious in, spaces that participants previously spent time in. Sophija referred to a "kind of ambient homophobia and transphobia" from certain individuals in her social circle, characterized by ingrained assumptions about queerness or language that was alienating. In other cases, there were more direct instances of discrimination, ranging from verbal threats to having photos taken of them in public without their consent. Megan told this story:

> "…One time I was with my girlfriend at a bar in London. So, this was during University time and from my understanding, no other reason we got kicked out other than kissing because, you know, everyone else was doing everything else there, but as far as we know it was just because it was two girls, and that was why we had to leave because there was just no justification, there was no explanation. And I didn't seem to fit in with the rest of it, but that's the only time that I can really think about—like a blatant experience for me." ~ *Megan (33)*

Chris spoke positively about their experiences in Hamilton related to gender and sexuality compared to other cities. They recalled an instance in Toronto, however, of being physically assaulted due to their gender expression; and in their youth in Sudbury, they frequently noticed homophobic slurs being used in conversation about other people.

On the other hand, some participants found Hamilton was less safe or accepting of being queer. Some of the incidents of discrimination that participants experienced related to issues of class just as much as gender and sexuality. Class was the most pervasive intersection with gender and sexuality throughout the interviews. Barbara spoke about her experience being homeless and staying in a temporary shelter with her partner while they looked for an affordable place to live, eventually finding a place in Hamilton:

> "[The shelter] was a very bad place, and they basically didn't—they didn't help us to secure housing in any way. They just kind of lit a fire under our ass and said, "you'll be right back out on the street if you don't find somewhere to live right now". So then, we were there for—and we're so lucky they didn't… I hate to say that we're lucky, but—we're so lucky they didn't kick us out before we were able to find something. But we were there about two months, and uh, we were searching the entire GTA. We were searching in Mississauga, we were searching in Burlington, Oakville, um, the entire area around the South of Toronto and Hamilton. And we were finding that it was doors slammed in our faces… Luckily, I got approved for ODSP, um, that autumn. I was not

> doing great, so, that's good. Um, but that—that was just as difficult because no one wanted to rent to anyone on ODSP as well." ~ *Barbara (32)*

Barbara's experience spoke to the difficulty with upward mobility in that the more disadvantaged an individual is, the further discrimination they encounter on the basis of this position. Kit also remarked that they were "more impacted by economic barriers than by gender." The theme of affordable housing specifically was pervasive throughout these interviews. Almost every participant cited housing *accessibility* as one of their greatest concerns and difficulties in moving decisions, and several (though fewer) specified that their gender expression or sexual orientation was a factor in this barrier.

Discourse and Narratives of Gender and Sexuality

More covert forms of discrimination surfaced in these interviews, characterized more by a systemic bias in relations between people. Discursive sense of place for queer experiences relates to the ways about which gender and sexuality are spoken beneath the explicit use of language, grammar, or logic (Foucault, 1969, pp. 116), and how this discourse shapes perceptions of place. To use spatial analogy, discourse involves centering and decentering different perspectives or values—those which certain language about gender and sexuality symbolizes. Cisnormative, heteronormative, and amatonormative perspectives, for example, underpin the worlds that queer people inhabit as 'other' (i.e., on the discursive periphery); and further, intersecting power relations such as race and class reproduce perspectives on gender and sexuality that center whiteness and neoliberal values like individualism and profit (Johnston, 2018; Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020). These are issues that participants of colour and low-income raised about Hamilton.

> "There is a new queer bar, but they renovicted somebody. So, I don't really want to go to [there], even though it's supposed to be like a gay place." ~ *Sophija (34)*

> "Uh… I hate to say it, but I think [perceptions of queerness are] worse here. Like, the queer community itself – people that are LGBT – coming together is one thing, but in terms of like, the greater community, it doesn't feel like people are accepting at all. Um, and a few rainbow stickers on windows doesn't really help either." ~ *Barbara (32)*

The imagery of "rainbow stickers on windows" evokes a fatigue common to queer people towards the commercialization of 2SLGBTQIA+ movements, sometimes referred to as *rainbow washing* (Whittemore, 2022) or *pinkwashing* (Rosenberg, 2023). Barbara spoke to this process the most; not only did 'queer-friendly' businesses impose class barriers to inclusion (i.e., the expectation of spending money and/or mistreatment based on dress/appearance), but even events organized by queer communities often come with financial and mobility barriers that exclude queer individuals who are lower income or homeless. Barbara described this as 'alienating', 'miserable', and 'disappointing'.

> "The whole inclusivity thing kind of falls to pieces; like, the illusion shatters when you've got more than one of these [struggles]. So basically, it's okay to be queer as long

> as you're wealthy… If you've got money to spend, we accept you; you're good. [laughing] We accept your dollar." ~ *Barbara (32)*

Rainbow washing was a significant concern for Olivia as well: "it feels very, like, hollow and also stereotypical." The difference between forms of queer symbolism, Olivia noted, can be criticized by the material changes that businesses make to improve the lives of queer people in tangible ways, such as employing queer people, or vintage/thrift shops selling gender inclusive clothing, to name a few of her suggestions.

The Spatiality of Cisheteronormativity

Two common themes emerged in the interviews regarding the way that *immediate* social networks framed gender and sexuality: one is in the childhood and family lives of the participants, in which these concepts were seldom discussed at all. The 'home' was frequently a site where normative genders and sexualities were reinforced, and by their normalization, this site served to relegate non-normative genders and sexualities to the discursive periphery—as a less accessible and less tangible possibility (or not a possibility at all) for lived experience. In phenomenological terms, non-normative genders and sexualities were reproduced perceptually as *un*familiar by orienting subjects away from these expressions/relations and towards more familiar ones (i.e., cisheterosexuality). This process of constant reorientation therefore makes it difficult for queer individuals to occupy these non-normative modes of existence (or even apprehend their possibility) until later life. Here are the discourses on gender and sexuality in the home and early lives according to participants (author's emphasis):

> "… I don't think it was ever, like, 'Oh, I can't be this,' or 'it would be bad to be this.' It was more like, this is an *uncomfortable* thing and it's *different*. Um, and it's easier not to, like—it's easier to identify as straight and not to question things." ~ *Sarah (24)*

> "…In elementary school, my dad said, 'you know your uncle… you know, we love him… he's gay. This is what that means. It's fine. But don't go running around telling everyone about it…' And so, it was always kind of one of those things where it's like, *it's okay to be gay, but how it presents might need to look a certain way for it to be acceptable*… at least at that time, maybe." ~ *Megan (33)*

In the above cases and others, gender and sexual nonconformity is either ignored due to the default assumption that any given person is cisgender and heterosexual unless stated or learned otherwise, or it is actively suppressed from a point of shame. As adults, the participants in this study frequently strove to reorient themselves through forming connections with other queer folks where different interpersonal relations and self-expressions could take shape:

> "The queer hangouts I go to are definitely important. I feel like they really help affirm my identity. Like earlier, when I was talking about how people, you know, assume things about you… I remember going to like a queer meetup at a coffee shop with my roommate and telling him, it's really nice to be somewhere where people don't just assume that we're a couple. It's also just nice to be around other queer people. There's just that sense

> of community. You're around people who kind of get it and you don't have to constantly explain stuff to them." ~ *Olivia (29)*

In either case, the act of *not* speaking is the dominant mode of governance of gender and sexual nonconformity. This discourse forms a combination of, in the former case, 'othering' or abnormalizing queerness, and in the latter case, relegating it to being inferior or undesirable. Discourse thus *spatializes* gender and sexuality in reproducing cisheteronormativity.

The Spectacle of Queerness

The other way that social networks framed gender and sexuality among these participants was outside of the home such as school or adult friendships, in which language coded as queer was not so much suppressed as it was highlighted or used derogatively:

> "…Now that I'm thinking about it, back in the day, 'gay' definitely used to be used like a derogatory term, right? It was way back when people would say, like, 'that's so gay' to signify something, you know, bad." ~ *Olivia (29)*

> "Like many people, when I was a child, being gay was not something that was normalized. It was something that was ridiculed, you know, as an insult to call someone gay, and that persisted into my teen years. And maybe it wasn't until like my early twenties that being gay was a little bit more acceptable and less taboo. In terms of gender, like being trans, when I was a child, it was definitely something where you're like 'oh my gosh!' A 'cross-dresser' was like the term, right? Or someone who 'had a sex change'. But like, the word of 'being trans' didn't even exist [yet]." ~ *Marie (36)*

As shown in Olivia and Marie's case, and was indeed common among nearly all participants, the target of queerphobia was not always the subject themselves, but nonetheless, observing the discourse on queerness was enough for queer subjects to carry these narratives with them throughout their lives; and indeed, into each new place they went. But these narratives of queerness are seldom clear-cut, like in cases of value judgments. Even more open conversation about queerness could regard it as something still negative or strange—the discourse of the 'spectacle':

> "[My partner] and his friends could make jokes, um, and comments about—they would be the type to be like, 'oh, it's so hot the two women are making out' or something… and would fetishize it." ~ *Sarah (24)*

Participants generally characterized discourses in their youth regarding gender and sexuality as abnormalizing, and the acts of speaking about them served not to normalize them but to reproduce their unfamiliarity. These discourses are socio-spatial; as the interviews showed, forms of power (like cisheteronormativity) operate to orient an individual's sense of place accordingly. To *be* a certain way is always to be *in certain spaces* or not, and in certain ways. In other words, perception (in sense of place) doesn't proceed from raw sensation and subsequently interpret this sensation based on previous memories as classical interdisciplinary research on sense of place suggests. Rather, previous lived experiences become objectified in new sensations

at their outset. Some participants also internalized discourses, regarding their own gender or sexual nonconformity as either 'taboo' or as a poor reflection of their character:

> "I think in grade four I learned that there was such a thing as, like, lesbians. I had these beliefs in my family that people were doing this just for attention, right? So, it's almost like there's part of me that identified with that and part of me that was just like, "no, you're just an attention-seeking horrible person." And so, it's weird because I came out to other people before I came out to myself, you know what I mean? Like, it's like I would tell other people this, and then just be like, internally, "gosh, you're such an attention-seeking horrible person for like, lying to people"." ~ *Chris (34)*

Chris' comment on drawing 'attention' to oneself illustrates the phenomenal effect of directing one's perception to something such that the (queer) individual becomes the object in the eyes of others; is perceived from numerous positions. What we observe in the perceptions of queer individuals of their environments is a shift from the apprehension of objects to the awareness of oneself as an object apprehended by other subjects.

The Spatiality of Queerness

As we've developed thus far, early in the life courses of queer individuals, conversations around gender and sexuality are often had only inasmuch as they reproduce normative perspectives; that is, the default mode of existence of being straight, allosexual, and cisgender. For our participants, this kind of discourse-via-absence configured a world in which their identities needed to be discovered later, often after a sense of place had taken on various forms. These later formative moments of self-actualization (like 'coming out') often occurred in environments that participants felt most sensibly comfortable in; subsequent to these stories, what participants reported were most conducive to their sense of place tended to be environments that replicated these formative moments. In effect, positive sensory/spatial associations with queer identity produced a greater attachment to those contexts later.

Building community, as discussed above, is one way of reclaiming pride and validity in one's gender or sexuality. But additionally, participants found it important for their sense of self and belonging to have conversations about these subjects; engaging in what is sometimes a form of counter-discourse:

> Sam: I think that a big way of expressing my like, gender and sexuality is through like, you know, just like discussing gender and sexuality with those people in my life.
>
> Caris: Yeah. So, like conversation sort of facilitates that development of your own identity?
>
> Sam: Yeah, I think so. Um, maybe in multiple senses. Conversation helps me think through things about my own identity but also like, conversation is a way of expressing my identity to someone else and having that be heard, and like engaged with, I guess.

Interestingly, Sam and other participants described our interviews with them in just this way, the conversations being a tool to help think through their identities and relationship to

place. As mentioned, these counter-discourses – characterized by recentering and normalizing queerness – also involve reclaiming positive spatial associations. Where we see an interesting example of this combination of sensory experience and queer discourse is in the 'coming out' story of Sarah. She had spoken in detail of how much outdoor greenspaces, like parks, were central to her sense of place. And when she was asked about what coming out was like for her, this came up again:

> "I remember there's this, like, park bench in my… so in my third and fourth year I worked in student residences, like as a residence advisor—a lot of different names—and [in] the third year I remember sitting at the park bench in, like, the courtyard, I think, of the building… Two of my team members – one was a guy who identified as bi[sexual], one was a guy who identified as pansexual – I think we were talking about it in the context of if students have concerns about something, or if they want to talk about certain topics, they were like, "we're comfortable if it's like something related to sexuality if you're not comfortable" or something. And so that was how that came up. Um, and I think at that moment, for people who I had just met, and I was just getting to know, I was like "Oh… I think I'm bi too" or "maybe I'm pansexual." Like, it was this nice thing of like, "I don't really know you that well, and I don't really know about this thing," but it felt like a very safe space. And that ended up being like an awesome team, and I love them all, and I'm really good friends with them. So, yeah, I guess that's just like a moment that came to mind. Um, and I can kind of visually see us sitting at that bench having those conversations… It didn't really feel like we were sitting down and being, like, forced to come out to each other. It felt more like a "hey, this is something about me, so you can send people to me." It was just nice… I really hate the idea of coming out [smirking]." ~ *Sarah (24)*

Similarly, T also associated queer relations with parks and greenspaces, not only for non-heteronormativity, but for engaging in discourses that challenged *homo*normativity as well. As an asexual agender person, T integrates practices of platonic queerness into her "predominantly lesbian and bisexual femme friendship group."

> "I feel like in the spring [and] summer times, the park is a very—I'm sure you know this—it's a very complex place for queerness, right? For cruising reasons, for political reasons, protest reasons… and I really love having picnics with [queer folks], so we have a lot of queer little picnics together… Gage Park has become very key [place], and Bayfront is also one that I occupy with all sorts of kin. But I think it has a lot of memories as a queer place… And I never really thought about it until now. But yeah, the way we use parks in the city during the spring [and] summer is very important, and I have a lot of… I think we have our most queer conversations in those parks, more than like our little slumber parties, or our pizza nights, or whatever, like when we're out at restaurants. We kind of confess to each other the most intimate parts of ourselves, or we engage with each other the most queerly probably in our picnics." ~ *T (29)*

It was evident through these interviews that a sense of place for queer individuals often reflected the discursive limits of their gender or sexuality. In other words, a space of openness to speak one's gender or sexuality contradicts the experiences of being both silenced and *made* to

be exposed. This openness returned agency to individuals who had become used to being objects in others' perceptual fields—to be only perceived—rather than being affective of their own environments as well. Rey had summarized the overall relationship between sense of place and queerness as "hard to separate my comfort, how rooted I am somewhere, from who I am."

Among the most insightful findings of this study is that phenomenal place—that is, sense of place regarded by phenomenology—is imminently entangled with gender and sexuality. Specifically, queer subjects are immediately attuned to places; they are welcoming or unwelcoming, accessible or inaccessible. A place, even in its properties which are seemingly divorced from gender or sexuality (natural, built, etc.) is coded with emotional attachments by participants based on previous gendered/sexed experiences with a place. Phenomenally, we ought not to regard gender and sexuality as cultural or discursive layers that we superimpose onto geometric space, or interpretations of place, but rather as an existential part of an object-place for subjects.

Conclusions

This paper sought to explore the relationship between sense of place and being queer, inasmuch as queerness is the perception of social difference (Myrdahl, 2013). Phenomenology interprets this perception through a multiplicity of subject positions, and its particular usefulness in examining everyday geographies of individuals makes it appropriate to geographic research on issues like sense of place, gender and sexuality, and mobility. Using a geographic definition of sense of place as "how local residents perceive the places in which they live, what meanings they attribute to them, and how personal attachment to a place develops," we have demonstrated how queer subjectivities and sense of place can be dialectically understood. These findings contribute not only to research on 2SLGBTQIA+ community building but to emerging research on sense of place. Where sensory perceptions are commonly viewed as triggers for memory, onto which participants add their interpretations, this research emphasizes how gender and sexuality play a role in perception, in so far as individual identity, previous experiences, and external agents, serve to orient these perceptions. Overall, this paper demonstrates the importance of further research on queer identities and sense of place using phenomenology, especially using larger and more representative samples. Our findings from queer narratives suggest that gender and sexuality are fundamental aspects of experiential space, and that other constructions like race, class, and disability could be investigated from intersectional perspectives that we were not able to expand on in this paper.

Chapter Five: Migration Decision Making and Barriers among LGBTQA Adults

Introduction

Migration research in geography has long been dominated by economic and structural frameworks to understand why individuals move at various scales (Newbold, 2001; Newbold & Bell, 2002; Levy et al., 2020). Cost-benefit models represented migration decisions as the result of the individual weighing the outcomes of a migration (Sjaastad, 1962). 'Push' and 'pull' factors focussed on the characteristics of the places of origin versus destination that served to push migrants *away from* or pull them *toward* a place (Lee, 1966). The positivist roots of the discipline consequently came with largely behaviorist or economistic approaches that emphasized causes and effects of migration, which have been useful in understanding the question of why people move (Newbold, 2001; De Haas, 2011; Crescenzi et al., 2017).

More recent geographic scholarship has drawn attention to holistic perspectives on human migration (de Nardi, 2017; Berg, 2020; Hermaszewska et al., 2022; Crawford et al., 2023), as well as the nuance that permeates migration decisions and barriers, which has seen the emergence of concepts like "lifestyle migration" (Eimermann, 2015) and "survival migration" (Betts, 2013). Thompson's geographic imaginations approach suggests that "a culture of migration is a cumulative factor that produces migratory aspirations when there appear to be few tangible economic and/or social motivations" (Thompson, 2017). Much of this emerging scholarship has benefitted from ethnographic and qualitative studies to understand how shared identity influences migration perceptions and decisions. Greater attention has also been paid to the post-move attitudes of migrations—how they reflect on their migration decision and what they expect for the future (Lynnebakke, 2021). Among critical migration scholarship, researchers have challenged the heteronormativity of the discipline (Luibheid, 2004). Manalansan (2006) argues that "far from being a conservative force that leaves bodies and cultures intact, migration creates specific dilemmas and contradictory situations that disturb static notions of gender and sexuality."

While the precedent for research into queer geographies usually rests on healthcare access (Davies, et al., 2018; Giwa & Chaze, 2018; Hermaszewska et al., 2022; Yarwood et al., 2022), urban communities (Nash, 2013; Rosenberg, 2020), and the biopolitics of immigration (Seuffert, 2009; Alessi et al., 2016; Hedlund & Wimark, 2018; Franco, 2021), there is a lack of attention towards the social dimensions of migration for queer folk, particularly at the subnational level. Luibheid & Chavez's (2020) book is one of the few collections that explores all of these themes where 'queerness' and (im)migration intersect, and particularly subverts the preoccupations that migration studies has often had with economistic frameworks that not only assume a simply voluntary nature to migration, but also over and again recast migration along the backdrop of whiteness and coloniality (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2016; Hammami, 2020; Lee-Oliver et al., 2020). An understanding of spatiality is central to queer subjectivities and yet, as Lynda Johnston disclaimed ahead of her own exploration into the topic, "little is known about their [queer individuals'] relationship to place" (Johnston, 2019).

This paper seeks to contribute to the migration literature with queer experiences of regional mobility, and will do so by addressing three main research questions: What decisions do LGBTQA migrants make when moving to a new city? What barriers do they face when moving to a new city? And how do they reflect on their migration experiences in relation to previous places of residence? We first give a brief overview of migration studies and its contemporary

applications to LGBTQA populations, and then we apply an ethnographic approach to analyze the migration experiences of fourteen self-identified queer residents of Hamilton, Ontario. To conclude the paper, we propose directions for future research.

Background

In addition to responding to economic considerations, migration is an ongoing process of negotiating spaces along several axes such as age, language, and ethnicity (Luibheid, 2008; Stella & Gawlewicz, 2021). And this process is exemplified clearly through gender and sexuality in ways that make queer studies and migration studies a unique and diverse intersection of research (Manalansan, 2006). Ristock et al., (2019) focussed on experiences with violence among Indigenous Canadian migrants who were Two-Spirit and LGBTQ. Drawing on a cost-benefit model, Gamarel et al. (2021) analyze the experiences of transgender migrants with gender-affirming care in San Francisco. Intensive qualitative studies have used smaller samples to gain a deeper understanding of the subjectivities of queer migrants: Fobear (2020) examined the sense of being 'in and out of place' for gay people seeking asylum in Vancouver; and Winton (2022) and de Nicolás Izquierdo (2022) each followed the stories of Central American trans women to examine mobility "*as* a kind of survival," advancing the concept of "survival migration" (Betts, 2013). This emerging focus of research on place-based queer intersubjectivities demonstrates that queer folks have a particular relationship with place that calls for further attention.

One of the most recent qualitative studies on the sub-national migration of Queer people is that of Lewis (2013) who focussed on 24 gay men who had moved from across Canada and the United States to Ottawa, Ontario. Lewis advanced 'coming-out migration' in academic discourse, which refers to the co-productive process of 'moving out' and 'coming out' among Queer communities. He says: "Many men indicated that even while they had not self-disclosed a gay identity to others or even themselves, they still reasoned that moving away would be helpful in managing the potential process of coming out." The process of becoming that we refer to in the coproduction of 'moving out' and 'coming out' is not necessarily undergone intentionally, or with foresight on the part of the subject. It also may not be expected. It does not presume that a coming out will precede a move, or vice versa. All it connotes is that there is some discursive relationship between migration and 'becoming' queer.

For queer folks, especially those who find themselves at the intersection of various subject positions, our lives "necessitate multiple forms of mobilities and migrations" (Cotten, 2012, pp. 120). Geographic migration, therefore, is as much a part of how queer bodies navigate space as is our social mobility that characterizes 'coming out', whether it be speech acts, behaviours, forging networks, and expressing ourselves in material ways; indeed, they are what *allow* us to navigate space. But more than only those ways that we affirm ourselves, the things we do to remain hidden also require a kind of mobility—the ability to move between subject positions in order to feel safe in one place versus another. This is important even in conversations about 'cost-benefit' and 'lifestyle' migrations, as we navigate migration decisions based on an understanding that space is conducive to our comfort and well-being in much the same way that we navigate our social relations (sex/gender) according to these factors.

Understanding the emerging attention to aspiration and desire in migration research (Collins, 2017; Carling & Collins, 2018) has opened the possibilities of 'sexuality as an aspiration' (Usta & Ozbilgin, 2023). However, what queer migration studies and broader

sociological research can show us is that the preoccupation with "choice over structural analysis", as Benson and Osbaldiston (2016) put it, threatens to assimilate queer migrations – and communities – into a neoliberalizing logic of individualism and inclusion that compromise on material improvements to migrant experiences (Luibheid, 2008; Lewis & Naples, 2014). While this has particularly been studied at the international level of queer immigrants and asylum-seekers, we argue that mobility for GRSMs (Gender, Romantic, and Sexual Minorities) at the subnational level will become an increasingly concerning topic in countries like the US or Canada, as subnational governments continue to propose or introduce public restrictions related to gender and sexuality (Eichner, 2023; Redding, 2023; Saville, 2023; Lupu, 2024). The US Transgender Survey (USTS) of over 90,000 transgender people indicated that nearly half of respondents had considered moving to another state due to state laws "targeting transgender people for unequal treatment" (USTS, 2022). Suen and Chan (2021) analyzed a similar phenomenon of "Gay Brain Drain" in Hong Kong.

While migration among queer folk may still have economic motivations, it is likely that other factors, including lifestyle, safety, how welcoming communities are, and the idea of 'moving out and coming out' influence the decision to relocate (Rodriguez-Pena, 2023). In this paper, therefore, we explore the myriad reasons that may be involved in 'queer migrations' by analyzing interviews with recent migrants to Hamilton who self-identify as queer.

Study Context

Hamilton is a mid-sized city in Ontario, Canada southwest of Toronto with a municipal population of 569,000, and a census metropolitan area population of 785,000 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2021). Nationally, Statistics Canada estimated Canada's 2SLGBTQ+ population at this time was about 1,000,000, out of whom 75,000 were transgender or non-binary (2021). In Hamilton specifically, research from Mills et al. (2019) reports that 93% of trans people feel unsafe, and over 50% of queer Hamiltonians have faced harassment, violence, or hate crimes.

Methods

Fourteen interviews were conducted between 2022 and 2023 with LGBTQA residents of Hamilton on their migration decision-making process, barriers to their moving to Hamilton, and comparisons with their previous cities of residence. Participants were recruited using social media and a digital poster. Additionally, organizations working with and for queer individuals were contacted and asked to distribute the poster, and the study was shared in-person with queer groups and events in Hamilton. Participants were interviewed using Zoom, and the interviews were audio and video recorded and transcribed. Participants were contacted approximately one year later with the opportunity to provide clarifications or updates. Subsequent thematic analysis drew from existing migration literature on causes of and barriers to migration to better understand queer lived experiences with a migration process, and individual cases were analyzed to identify commonalities among participants. Of the 14 participants in this study, 11 were born in Canada. Migration origins and timelines are documented in the table below. All protocols were reviewed by and received clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Age	Birthplace	Moved to Hamilton	Self-Identification
Lilith	she/her	18	Calgary	2022	trans woman
Sarah	she/her; they/them	24	Montréal	2021	bisexual; pansexual; queer
Sam	she/her	28	Edmonton	2021	queer; bisexual
Kit	they/them	28	North Bay	2021	non-binary; genderqueer
Olivia	she/her	29	Mississauga	2021	queer
T	she/her; siya	29	Calgary	2018	agender; gray asexual; queer
Rey	they/them	29	Brazil	2021	non-binary; transgender; queer
Nicole	she/her	31	Windsor	2021	bisexual; queer
Barbara	she/her	32	Simcoe	2019	lesbian
Gillian	she/her	32	Kenya	2018	trans woman; bisexual
Megan	she/her	33	Hamilton	2022	queer
Chris	they/them	34	London	2022	non-binary; gay; lesbian; queer
Sophija	she/her	34	USSR	2016	trans woman; bisexual
Marie	she/her	36	Victoria	2018	undefined

Table 1: Demographic and Geographic Information of Participants

Participants ranged from 18 to 36 years of age, with a median age of 30 years. 9 participants identified as white or Caucasian, 3 identified as Mixed race (white/Persian; Indian/Scottish; Philippinx/white), 1 as Latinx, and 1 as Chinese Cambodian. Levels of education ranged from High School Diploma to Doctorate Degree, although the majority of participants obtained at least a post-secondary degree. Average annual household income ranged from $10,000 to $100,000, with the median being $40,000–$50,000. The occupational status of participants varied at the time of the interview, but included employment in the social services, healthcare, graduate school, and unemployment. Participants all self-identified under the 2SLGBTQIA+ umbrella, with most identifying in some way as ‘queer’. Gender, romantic, and sexual identities represented among participants included lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, non-binary, queer, asexual, agender, and genderqueer. All participants are referred to using the pronouns and pseudonyms they requested at the beginning of the interview; a random pseudonym was assigned if none was requested.

Results

This discussion is broken down into three sections: the migration decision process, barriers to migration, and retrospective perceptions on migration. Within causes of migration, common themes that emerged were the availability of employment, affordability of housing, pursuit of education, proximity to queer communities, and access to nature. Barriers to migration were overwhelmingly economic, with housing accessibility as the greatest concern among participants. The majority of participants felt positively overall about their decision to move to Hamilton, although this didn’t necessarily equate to wanting or expecting to remain in Hamilton in the near future. This sentiment generally reflected the circumstantial nature of the reasons for moving in the first place; factors like employment and housing never ceased to be challenges or concerns for migrants after moving.

In their qualitative study of sexuality and migration, Usta & Ozbilgin (2018) observed that “participants often explained their migration reasons through general socio-economic concerns. Later in the interviews, their desire for security about their sexuality, intimacy, and gender-motivated their initial reasons for migration.” This was also the case in our interviews,

where participants were asked about any reasons they migrated to Hamilton, and upon further discussion, also made connections to their gender and sexuality.

The Migration Decision-Making Process

All of the participants in this study expressed multiple considerations in their decision to move to Hamilton. Nicole in particular discussed her thought process in detail, which involved starting with a number of potential options and systematically narrowing down places. She and her partner, being Anglophone, were concerned about what they perceived to be growing Québec Nationalism and language barriers that prevented them from fully contributing to a community. These reasons also impacted Nicole's job search where, for example, provincial certifications might leave her stuck in Québec for employment. These were the initial reasons that prompted their decision to leave Québec—they just needed a destination:

> "We had considered the east coast for a bit. My partner is from BC; he grew up just outside of Vancouver and both of us really loved being near water. And so, being on a coast would be really nice but BC is just really expensive. Um… So, it didn't feel feasible and so we thought maybe the East Coast and so we looked there, and it looked like things were also getting really expensive out there and um, that felt like kind of more of a, like, arduous process to move out there. So, yeah… We just sort of like, the general East Coast. We didn't sort of narrow in… Halifax we were actually considering because I have a friend out there who really loves it. But yeah. Ultimately, we thought maybe it's too expensive, we just weren't sure […] And then it was just sort of Ontario, was really the next step there." ~ *Nicole (31)*

Even once Ontario seemed to be their destination province, they had a number of further considerations to make:

> "Toronto, we knew, was definitely not an option, and Windsor was not an option. I didn't want to go back there. Um, so Hamilton seemed like, you know, close enough to Toronto if we wanted to get like, the big city stuff. Um, but maybe also having some accessible nature as well. Um, was sort of the idea that we got about it." ~ *Nicole (31)*

Nicole also cited social media, such as YouTube and Instagram, as mediums through which to learn about Hamilton and whether she would want to live there. Currently, Nicole is pursuing a post-secondary program based remotely.

Housing and Transportation

Decisions to migrate can be multi-faceted and reflect personal attributes as well as traditional push and pull motivations for migration. During interviews with queer migrants, participants were asked why they initially considered moving *away from* their place of origin, and then subsequently why they chose Hamilton specifically. This distinction not only reflects the push-pull model frequently validated in migration research but attempts to offer participants alternative perspectives from which to think about their decision-making process. In some cases, push and pull factors were the same; housing affordability, for example, was the most common

reason cited among participants for moving to Hamilton. Classic *macro-adjustment* models reflect how an economic variable like affordability describes the spatial relationship between the two places (Newbold, 2001), and therefore acts as both a push and pull factor. For participants Megan, Sam, and Gillian, the cost of housing was more affordable in Hamilton than in the cities they previously lived in (particularly Toronto and Mississauga) or compared to other cities that were candidate options for other reasons.

Another example of a dual push-pull factor was proximity to work and/or commuting distance. When asked what she hoped to gain from moving to Hamilton, Olivia responded, "an hour of my time back each day [laughing]." This was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which she noticed traffic volume fluctuating greatly depending on public health restrictions and the number of people working from home at a given point in time. On the other hand, Sam moved from St. Catharines to Hamilton in 2021. She worked mostly remotely at a job based in Toronto, but when she needed to commute, the distance was difficult. Moving to Hamilton was "the obvious choice", because it was closer to Toronto, but it was easier to cycle in and was "not just a bunch of high rises." Out of all the areas around Toronto, Gillian said that housing affordability in Hamilton was the most feasible, and it was still close enough to her job that she could commute. "Everything kind of went fairly smoothly," she said, regarding the technical move, although "it did take a bit to get back into commuting again as a lifestyle, I suppose."

Barbara also cited housing as her primary reason for moving, but this was due to the systemic discrimination she encountered from others for being homeless and on ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program).

> "[The shelter we were living in] was a very bad place, and they basically didn't… they didn't help us to secure housing in any way. They just kind of lit a fire under our ass and said, "*you'll be right back out on the street if you don't find somewhere to live right now*"… We're so lucky they didn't—I hate to say that we're lucky, but—we're so lucky they didn't kick us out before we were able to find something. But we were there about two months, and uh, we were searching the entire GTA [Greater Toronto Area]. We were searching in Mississauga, we were searching in Burlington, Oakville, um, the entire area around the South of Toronto and Hamilton. And we were finding that it was doors slammed in our faces… Luckily, I got approved for ODSP, um, that autumn. I was not doing great, so, that's good. Um, but that—that was just as difficult because one wanted to rent to anyone on ODSP as well." ~ *Barbara (32)*

As a consequence of these class and health-related barriers, their decision to move to Hamilton was one of necessity; it was one of the only places they could find where they could afford the rent and landlords "wouldn't slam the door in our face" (Barbara). Moreover, it was also one of the few cities that had access to the services Barbara and her partner needed, such as public transit. "I'd like to say that I came to Hamilton for the cool artsy culture or something, but no… I was just like, 'I can maybe survive? That's neat. Sounds good, sign me up'."

Another example where physical features of urban environments act as push factors (that encouraged participants to move away from previous cities) was Gillian's experience living in Mississauga. She had lived and worked in several cities within the Greater Toronto Area, but felt strongly about Mississauga and knew she wanted to leave:

> *Caris:* What prompted you to first consider moving away from Mississauga?
>
> *Gillian:* I hated it.
>
> *Caris:* Sure. Why did you hate it?
>
> *Gillian:* Because it's nothing… Mississauga isn't anything. It's… it's a name for an area on a map where there's houses and like, a scattering of stores here and there. Like there's, there's nothing, nothing cohesive about Mississauga.
>
> *Caris:* …If I were to, say, use the terms like 'placelessness' or like, a lack of a unique identity, would those resonate with you, with what you mean?
>
> *Gillian:* Yes, they would.

She went on to explain:

> *Gillian:* There's transit in Mississauga, but it's garbage… It's very spaced-out buses… I was completely isolated unless I wanted to specifically go to a specific place, because there's no destinations in Mississauga. Like, there's a mall you could go to, or like a set of stores in a cluster… But there's no place to go. It's just a wasteland. I hated Mississauga… [My former partner and I] didn't really consider any place other than Hamilton. I mean, we briefly considered going back to Toronto. But it was fairly brief because the reason we moved to Hamilton specifically, was that, one, it's a city. I know Mississauga is a city technically speaking, but it's not [laughing]. So, Hamilton is a city. And it's affordable. And I had friends here.

Education and Employment

Personal attributes, including moving for education and educational attainment, as well as occupational advancement, are well-established motives for migration. In this study, three participants migrated primarily to pursue further post-secondary education. One of the factors that influenced Sarah's decision to move the most was beginning her graduate degree in public health. Initially, she had considered doing so at McGill or the University of Toronto. Due to her interests, she was later drawn to McMaster's program as well as Hamilton's relevant presence of organizations for that work.

> "… Within a few days, I went from being like, very set on staying in Montreal [and] super uncomfortable about the idea of moving to Hamilton – this seemingly random place for me – to suddenly being really excited about it. Um, a few things that changed my mind other than like, the program: the more I learned about it I seemed to like it a bit more than McGill's, but the city itself was a big factor. And I just heard from people who lived here that they like, learned to really love it. They liked that it was a bit smaller." ~ *Sarah (24)*

Occupation is also an important determinant of migration. Like Sarah, several of the participants in this study worked in, or in proximity to, healthcare. Chris and Marie cited a job

offer and medical residency respectively as their reasons for moving. When their work contract in healthcare was not renewed in Northern Ontario, Chris had to look elsewhere for work, which ultimately prompted their decision-making process:

> "I really wanted to stay [north]. It's just healthcare funding in the north, it's hard. And in [my field], I don't know, it's complex—it's just a funding issue. I really wanted to stay in Northern Ontario, and I couldn't… It was absolutely about the job." ~ *Chris (34)*

Other smaller towns in Central Ontario were also on Chris' list of potential places to move to, but due to the strain that COVID-19 had on healthcare systems in smaller communities, and the lack of visible queer communities, Hamilton wound up being the place that seemed most conducive to their needs. Chris' decision to move to Hamilton was informed by a number of perceptions they had about the city: "hey, this is probably similar to London because there's a university there and it's not that different in terms of population size." After moving, however, they noticed that it felt a lot more urban[ized] than they expected, and it reminded them more of Toronto than anywhere else.

Social and Cultural Factors

The previous factors discussed can be categorized into material (housing, transportation, occupational) reasons for moving and physical/geographic reasons (access to nature). The final reason, which was also the most variable, was social/cultural reasons. These include, among other examples, community as it relates to queer identities. While it was not cited frequently as a reason for moving *a priori*, it was discussed in detail by most participants as having great importance for their experience living in Hamilton.

Chris said that gender and sexuality were on their mind when deciding where they wanted to practice medicine. They were often the "only visibly queer person" in the Northern Ontario communities they moved between, and homophobia was an issue, both explicitly in the attitudes that clients had towards them, and implicitly in their difficulty building trust due to a lack of local exposure to visible queer people. Chris' concern about belonging was not only an aspiration as they decided on moving, but a realized outcome of that move. Reflecting on their experiences of being queer in Hamilton, they said, "it's a lot easier to connect with people because I'm not an anomaly."

Lilith noted that one of her main reasons for moving to Hamilton was to live with her mother, who had recently moved to Hamilton herself. She said, "I needed to get away from my dad," who she felt like she didn't have a good relationship with. At the same time, access to gender and health-related resources were a significant concern during this process:

> "I was worried about what resources I might be able to reach… For example, moving from [place A] to [place B], it's like the difference between… like, A is a relatively big city for where it is, and B is a small town, right? And like, growing up, from the ages of like, I think I was in grade seven when I was in A… but I started high school in B. So, during that time I was very worried about wanting to start my transition and getting on hormones as early as possible. And that move definitely gave me a lot of anxiety, and like… if I was in control of that move, I would not have taken the opportunity to move there because of the lack of resources I saw in B […] Also, one of the things I would

> have considered was like, how accepting people in the area were of people like me […] Moving to Hamilton, I didn't have any worries. Um, just because I think I'm more sure of myself now, and like… I'm more confident in my identity... I'm more confident and I needed to find like, resources to create my own home if that makes sense." ~ *Lilith (18)*

Kit lived in Guelph during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This had been a difficult time for them, and one of the reasons they considered moving out of Guelph. They noted feeling 'suffocated' and 'isolated' in the downtown area, with very little to do and travelling only back and forth from home to work. The summer only exacerbated this, as Guelph was, according to Kit, "a revolving door of students". Moving to Hamilton was a learning experience, from which Kit gained confidence to move again if they needed to in the future.

Barriers to Moving

Barriers to migration are noted throughout the migration literature, with references dating back to the work of Ravenstein (1889) and Lee (1966). Within the current paper, two types of barriers emerged from these interviews. We understand migration barriers to mean: 1) factors that make moving to a new city more difficult, or 2) factors that, once already living in a new city, were found to be challenging. If a migration experience is to be understood holistically, including the migrant's integration or 'settling in' to a new place, then barriers to migration ought to take into account 'post-move' challenges.

With regards to the first type of barrier, housing accessibility, in addition to being an incentive for some people, was a significant barrier for others. This summarized most of the experiences that participants had with barriers to moving *before* actually living in Hamilton (i.e. moving residences). This is unsurprising given that the decision-making process often prioritizes securing housing first.

> "I mean, I think the biggest barrier of moving anywhere is finding housing, like particularly affordable housing. I think that I got pretty lucky with that. But it was something I was quite worried about or like, stressed about." ~ *Sam (28)*

As Barbara had pointed out, potential landlords had turned her away because they refused to accept individuals who received disability support. Nicole also experienced difficulty with landlords; due to the distance between Hamilton and Montréal, she couldn't travel to view apartments in-person, but landlords wouldn't accommodate her with virtual viewing, remote correspondence, or even signing a lease electronically. And "seemingly a lot of landlords were really put off by the fact that we were not [residing] in Hamilton already."

The second type of barrier varied significantly, which reflected the diverse lifestyles of participants. It included challenges ranging from transportation to social isolation. In some cases where participants moved to Hamilton after 2020, barriers were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Four participants cited COVID-19 as a migration barrier, particularly due to the public health restrictions that limited access to services and resources. For instance, the pandemic limited Olivia's ability to explore Hamilton and to adjust to the city more quickly because businesses and local events were closed, postponed, or operated in a limited capacity.

Nicole noted issues with car dependency in Hamilton that impacts the accessibility of public transit:

> "I find if you don't have a car in Hamilton, then it's kind of awful… like, we're able-bodied, we can walk most places and I still find it to be real challenging to get around, you know? Somewhere that takes a seven-minute drive is like an hour on the bus, type of thing." ~ *Nicole (31)*

T noted that one of her greatest barriers to settling into Hamilton after moving was loneliness. It took time for her to adjust to routines and develop familiarity with the place, while at the same time, having ambition to do well in her master's degree. Having never experienced being alone in this way before, T felt, "sometimes it was devastating, and other times it was very freeing."

Kit cited a specific concern in Hamilton about police overfunding: "I'm not happy with how criminalized homeless people are treated by the police, and then the consequences of that treatment are further stigmatized." They also added that the intersections of class and gender were characteristic of their lived experiences: "I'm more impacted by economic barriers than by gender."

And finally, the lack of access to nature compared with rural or Northern regions of Ontario was difficult for participants like Chris who felt a sense of identity connected to the natural environment. After living in Hamilton for a few months, they told me:

> "I miss these things… It's almost like you've been cut off from a part of yourself, or like you've lost somebody that you love. And it's just like, people move all the time, why does this matter? You know, why does it feel like this? But yeah, I think that it's a big part of me; maybe more than I realized." ~ *Chris (34)*

Retrospective Perceptions on Migration

The way that residents reflect on their migration experiences provides a lot of insight into the effects of relocating on wellbeing, mental health, and sense of place. Throughout the interviews, participants were asked to compare and contrast the places they had lived in throughout their lives and assess roughly what they thought about their decision to move to Hamilton in hindsight.

> "I think of it as positive […] it's been hard with um, the pandemic and not meeting like a ton of people […] I'm learning that I do feel like I grow when I'm forced to relocate […] I like the city. Um, I feel like it's got a fighting—a fighting spirit to it. Um, which—I mean no one should have to fight to stay in a city that they grew up in, but that's kind of the reality of a lot of cities these days and… yeah, I have a lot of respect for people here. And it feels like a place that I could stay for a while." ~ *Sarah (24)*

While most participants reflected positively upon their decision to move to Hamilton, some also said they don't see themselves living in Hamilton in the future. Rey said that, while moving to Hamilton was "the best decision I've made in a while" in terms of mental health and sense of community, Hamilton is most likely not a final destination for them, and that they would like to move out to the (rural) country in the future. When we followed up with Lilith one year

after our initial interview, she had just moved to Mississauga with her mother. And finally, Marie saw herself moving back to BC with her family when her medical residency was finished:

> "I think I've missed BC the whole time. But I also recognize that Hamilton was an opportunity, and it still is an opportunity for us to really establish our sense of self and family and my identity, my partner's identity, and really grow and develop into the like, really healthy relationship that both of us have with ourselves and each other. So, I think that's the way I view Hamilton." ~ *Marie (36)*

Participants were also asked what they hoped or expected to gain from moving to Hamilton, if anything. Chris hoped that moving to Hamilton would give them professional experience, and while it was too soon for them to say whether Hamilton would be a long-term home for them, they "would love to be able to make things work and stay here long-term and feel comfortable with that."

But a sense of community was arguably the most common theme that emerged from these interviews. As queer individuals with diverse backgrounds, many hoped to find not only a community they could be a part of in Hamilton, but also to discover themselves. We closed our interviews by asking participants an open-ended question: how did they view their relationship between gender/sexuality (or 'being queer') and migrating? In other words, did they feel there was a connection between their transition into a new (queer) identity and their transition between places? This is what some had to say:

> "I feel really happy with my decision to migrate to Hamilton. Yeah, I feel like it's been a good place for me. Like, I've been able to develop some community here and I'm like, kind of looking forward to continuing to build that. I think there's been a period where I was kind of uncertain about like, where… well, for a lot of my life, I've been concerned about where I want to be, because I've moved so much. Like, I do feel connected to many different places, but at the same time I don't feel connected to any place, like I could go anywhere. And so, for a while there was a lot of… I was feeling like, you know, thinking a lot about like, okay well, is this really somewhere I want to stay? Like, does it make sense to be like investing in like building a life here if I'm just going to move again? Or, like, where would I move again? Where do I want to be and how do I make these decisions? And I think it's more recently with like getting a new job that I'm like pretty excited about that I feel like a lot of that uncertainty has like gone away for me, where I feel… Yeah, I feel like good about being here. I feel like it's been like a good place for me and like, you know, I think I'll be here for a little while and there's a lot of positives about here. There are definitely like things that I miss about other places I've lived. And so, maybe at some point, I'll move somewhere else but for now I'm happy to be here." ~ *Sam (28)*

> "Hamilton is, I guess, my coming out city. It's my self-discovery city. It's here that I learned who I was… Hamilton is kind of where I've really built a stable sense of community." ~ *Gillian (32)*

While sentiments were largely positive, they were also nuanced. As noted earlier in the case of Marie and her family, the growth that she underwent in Hamilton served a purpose at that

time in her life. But with regard to where she was most deeply rooted out of all the places she had lived in, she said: "BC. Coastal BC. That's like 100% my home still to this day. As much as like, moving away I knew I would miss family and friends, I never knew I would ache and miss so badly for the location." She added:

> "I don't know that I identify with Hamilton the city to be honest, and maybe that's more of the hidden big point… we live on [the West side of Hamilton]. And this little neighborhood that we live in is very safe and quiet and predictable and like, it's great in that regard. So, it feels comfortable and home and safe. Whereas every time we go into Hamilton proper, like Downtown Hamilton, there's a complete sense of disconnect. I don't have any sense of community with Downtown. I feel unsafe, it's unpredictable, it's unclean… I don't connect with Hamilton, the city. I connect with our home, I connect with the walking distance locations of where we live, and the few places that we go for walks, like the Confederation Park, which is nature-based, or the Burlington waterfront, which is, you know, lake-based. Those are the main areas that I identify with… that are safe, clean, nature-based, predictable…" ~ *Marie (36)*

On the other hand, T knew she would likely move away from Hamilton soon but didn't want to. When asked if she sees herself in Hamilton in the near future, T noted that one of the reasons it has been hard for her to finish her PhD is because she doesn't want to leave her friends. This was particularly important given that her research is on friendship. This intimate focus on 'kinship'—which T regards a unique kind of queer relation—really encapsulates the emotional and unquantifiable aspect of migration decision-making for queer folks.

The way queer migrants reflect on their migration decision after the fact illuminates the complicated and concessional nature of migrating. At the outset of a migration, before it becomes actualized, potential migrants weigh a number of factors, among the most significant of which are economic variables like affordable housing. Most of our participants had a few possible destinations in mind with these considerations, at which point other variables were helpful in narrowing down decisions. However, reasons for migration are not static; most participants experienced barriers during and after the migration process would be considered 'complete'. That is, finding more affordable housing, or a queer community, doesn't cease to be an issue after a migrant has settled; it often re-emerges as a barrier and is subsequently reflected on by migrants in a quite different light than at the outset of their journey. A migration journey may be a stepping stone in a larger journey as it becomes a learning experience for the individual.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic may have made participant engagement and accessibility more difficult, as well as limiting the available research methods. All of these interviews and follow-ups were conducted over Zoom or by phone to prioritize health and safety of participants and researchers, but further research could employ in-person methods such as walk-alongs or visual/auditory records. Additionally, and most significantly, there were limitations to recruitment of participants for this study. Working with a population like GRSMs involves marginalized identities who may have been more wary of outsiders than other demographics (the researchers being in a position of power and all white, etc.). This may have resulted in fewer

people responding to the recruitment calls and could potentially account for the rate of those who did not participate after initial contact. There were also financial/material barriers to this research, namely that a greater incentive or lesser time commitment might have garnered more interest in participation. Finally, no self-identified men participated in this study, and even among respondents who were not ultimately interviewed, men were underrepresented. Transferability of these results is highly limited, but larger samples could help similar future research into our understanding of gender, sexuality, mobility, and place.

Conclusions

This paper analyzed the migration experiences of fourteen LGBTQA adults who had recently moved to Hamilton, Ontario. Results focused on the three themes of the migration decision process, barriers to migration, and retrospective perceptions of migration. Across the diverse reasons for choosing to move to Hamilton, the spatial proximity to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) was a significant factor, being both accessible to services and employment opportunities in Toronto, but not so close as to experience the congestion and transportation issues they associated with the larger city.

The interviews also demonstrated that class barriers were the most significant barrier to moving that LGBTQA people faced within Hamilton which in particular challenge the themes of affluence and consumption prevalent in lifestyle migration research (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2016). Although our study sample was predominantly low-middle income, it is worth noting that GRSMs generally have greater challenges with respect to employment and other social determinants of health (Denier & Waite, 2017; Mills & Oswin, 2024). Similar to other migrants, LGBTQA migrants needed to navigate housing affordability and the public health measures that impacted access to services and socialization as barriers to moving to, or settling into, Hamilton. But they also faced discrimination, either in their origin or in Hamilton, given their LGBTQA status. These conclusions corroborate previous research that demonstrates that gender, romantic, and sexual minorities often have to negotiate with other factors in their mobility, such as age, race, and socioeconomic status (Stella & Gawlewicz, 2021; Usta & Ozbilgin, 2023).

When participants were asked to reflect on their migration to Hamilton, most of them felt positively about their decisions overall. However, in almost every case, Hamilton was viewed as a less-than-ideal place, as a compromise in their needs and preferences. While they felt it was a more convenient city to live in than the GTA, it was still viewed less favourably than other areas (particularly in Ontario) with regards to, most notably, affordability and proximity to nature. On this latter point, many participants felt a disconnection between Hamilton and the less urbanized or rural regions of Ontario they had lived in previously, but it was a trade-off for job opportunities and higher engagement with queer communities.

Migration experiences are intertwined with a sense of identity such that queer individuals often create narratives that understand a relationship between queerness—nonnormative forms of gender, sexuality, and self-expression—and mobility or relocation. Migrations are typically casted as an economic construct, but this community navigates a number of other issues as well, which often presents as an intersection between class and other variables. Our research contributes to the broader literature on migration not only for queer populations who are typically underrepresented, but also by highlighting these overlapping factors. Further research should examine this relationship in more detail, especially regarding marginalized communities in the diversifying cultural and economic landscape of urban Canada.

Conclusion

In this section I want to briefly put into perspective how the three previous analytical chapters are related before discussing the limitations and general conclusions of this work. In Chapter 1, I reviewed sense of place research through a critical lens to determine how the topic is compartmentalized according to certain ontological dispositions that don't neatly align with a positivist/phenomenological divide. I elaborated three (inexhaustive and overlapping) frameworks used in sense of place research: sense-perception, relationality, and discursivity. In breaking down how these frameworks are commonly employed, I established a basis for developing a more holistic phenomenological approach to sense of place research that attends to various ontological and epistemological issues in the literature. I also integrated geographic theory into this new approach in order to take care in how place itself is regarded in this research. Adapting an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) from the emerging literature on queer experiences, I used these geographic perspectives to examine the relationship between the multi-faceted concepts treated herein, including gender and sexuality, embodiment, mobility, social space, discrimination, and decision-making. What follows is a discussion of how the results from these previous chapters relate and ought to be understood moving forward.

Meta-Analysis of Results

Chapters 1 and 4 (theory and application of sense of place respectively) were written relatively separately prior to being compiled. While reviewing sense of place literature in 2022, I found myself rather frustrated with the lack of clarity between the many theoretical frameworks researchers used for this concept. Whether it was the multidisciplinary treatment of sense of place or its abstraction and complexity (or just me), it was difficult to even find a starting point for it in the literature, let alone adapt or develop a framework for my use. It should also be noted that sense of place research could be organized in many ways, and mine isn't comprehensive or final. Still, the ontologies of sense of place research surfaced relatively naturally in my review, and I believe the results from all of the analyses, though particularly Chapter 4, strongly substantiate the review and therefore warrant further investigation.

My conversations with participants revealed very different pictures of sense of place across the board, though composed of similar dimensions. For example, while some participants had very little to share about greenspaces, others spoke more about them than anything else. Yet a 'being' or spatial horizon like 'greenspaces' was a distinct element for each individual interviewed, which could be spoken of clearly with regard to experience. More importantly though, these conversations also showed that a mental representation of a greenspace (again, for example) was inseparable from discursive associations of that space, so much so that it was difficult to grant priority to any one ontological status. Sarah had important moments of personal growth in greenspaces, while T used them for social bonding; both of them linking their significance to gender and sexuality, to their queer relations. And yet, perhaps no participant was as vivid in their descriptions of the natural environment as Chris, who seldom explicitly related their connection with the rocks, trees, or water to their non-binary gender.

Even as these sense-perceptions, relations, and discourses that constitute sense of place surfaced in the interviews, one important experiential concept surfaced in all of the analyses but was perhaps not given the treatment it deserved: attunement. Whether it was in discussions of embodiment and being-in-the-world as social space or in the discriminatory barriers throughout

the migration process, participants seldom needed any prompts to express their mood or emotional being related to these events. Sense of place is always attuned because our past experiences are always immanent in our present impressions; thus, the reflective and pre-reflective modes of experience featured across all of these chapters. Kit felt 'suffocated' and 'isolated' in Guelph in the early days of the pandemic; T recalled the isolation of Hamilton upon moving as 'sometimes devasting' and 'other times freeing'; Chris and Marie spoke extensively of a longing for the environmental characteristics of other places they had lived, about a 'sadness' for 'missing' them.

But most pervasively throughout this study, discomfort emerged among all of the participants with descriptions like *unsafe*, *unpredictable, uncertain, invasive, alienating, hypervigilant*… The constancy of looming threats to one's embodiment was stark. This overview of attunement is perhaps one of the most interesting empirical corroborations of the co-constituency of self and place through sense of place, because when participants described their immanent situation, it frequently blurred the distinctions between the place or surroundings, and one's feeling or state of consciousness. A place being unpredictable and unsafe was inherently connected with an embodied subject's hypervigilance, not necessarily in a cause-effect, subject-object relation, but in a unity of lifeworld where any priority is not *phenomenally* given but is rather only reflectively supposed.

Stress and anxiety are also not necessarily reducible to the pre-reflective or 'existential'. While thinking through housing and cost of living, some participants noted feeling 'worried' or 'stressed' about these prospects during the decision-making process. And indeed, the negotiation between one's authentic self-expression and one's compulsion to 'blend in' was a constant and deliberate calculation in many cases. Chapter 5 therefore gives a somewhat familiar treatment of migration decision-making and barriers to migrating; however, its results are important and its situation in this thesis provides a valuable contribution to phenomenological approaches to migration. In a more grounded sense, this chapter presents a range of migration types, including survival and lifestyle migrations, that figure in the decisions and movements of queer folks.

Limitations

The results from this research are difficult to generalize because an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) emphasizes the contextuality of each case. However, as discussed in the methodology, this approach is easily transferrable and has been demonstrated to be effective in smaller and larger datasets than mine.

A significant limitation to this research was that I conducted interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person engagement was more difficult. Consequently, I chose to conduct interviews remotely. While 11 of the 14 interviews were video recorded, the lack of in-person engagement may have impacted rapport with participants that otherwise might have been established. The social and socioeconomic environment of urban areas like Hamilton during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in its first few years, may have impacted the temporal relevancy of the results, as many of the participants spoke to experiences that were directly related to the effects of the pandemic. Nonetheless, I included clarifications where necessary when details were contingent upon this context, and the limited focus this had in my research was still highly useful.

There were three significant limitations to recruitment: first, I worked with a population that includes marginalized identities that may have been more wary of outsiders than other

demographics (myself being a researcher, white, etc.). While I am queer and trans, this was only made aware to participants upon corresponding over email. The hesitancy to engage with research as a member of a marginalized group that has not historically seen justice from academic research may have resulted in fewer people responding to the recruitment calls. Second, there were financial/material barriers to this research; it is unclear whether a greater incentive or lesser time commitment might have garnered more interest in participation. Third, no men participated in this study, and even among respondents who were not interviewed, men were underrepresented. This will likely impact the study results and the representativeness of the sample across genders.

My lack of previous experience as an interviewer may have impacted the quality of the data collection. However, I did notice that over the course of the fourteen interviews my communication and data keeping skills improved with the experience. Even before my analysis was complete, I noticed ways my research design could have been improved. One change I would make to the interview guide if I was to conduct this study again or take it further is its chronological structure. My initial reasoning for dividing questions between pre-move, move, and post-move, was to capture the immediate sensory experiences of separate places, and then to subsequently link them where memory and narrative were relevant. However, this introduced a degree of rigidity to the interview process that I didn't foresee or necessarily recognize immediately. It resulted in unnecessary repetition and disconnection of details where a less structured and more organic dialogue might have been more productive. In particular, it might be more effective to address memory through follow-up questions throughout the dialogue rather than near the beginning of the interview.

Finally, there were many directions I might have taken the analysis. This thesis draws on themes of humanistic geography, such as its derivation of phenomenological reduction by limiting as much as possible preconceived concepts and theories, as well approaching human experience in a holistic but contextual frame (Rodaway, 2015). Due to the contextual nature of the interview data, the spatial biographies developed in the first stage of analysis (essentially a short summary of the interview) were structured according to analytical codes based on certain statements throughout the interview that converged on a central articulable theme (Cope, 2010). For example, descriptions of one's sensory perceptions of certain places throughout the interview were grouped under the heading "sensory perceptions of the natural environment" and subheadings might have included 'greenspaces', 'water', etc. Or a participant who spoke extensively about their experiences with discrimination might have been broken down based on 'school' and 'the workplace' or based on themes like 'intersections with class discrimination'. Therefore, each interview turned out to be quite unique in what participants spoke the most about or regarded as the most characteristic of a certain place or their attitude towards it.

The larger second stage of analysis of the collective fourteen interviews relied primarily on latent content analysis. Overlapping themes were found across all or most interviews, such as themes like stigma and discrimination or housing affordability. Such themes were discussed in their commonality but without losing sight of the individual context of each person, hence the care taken in presenting complete quotations and qualifying specific experiences. All of this is to say that my analysis was chosen based firstly on epistemic justice for the participants themselves, and secondly for the quality and authenticity of the discussion rooted in a phenomenological method. This method turned out to yield useful insight, such as the brief manifest content analysis of attunement in the above section.

Final Discussion

This thesis developed and applied a phenomenological method to study the spatial experiences of gender, sexual, and romantic minorities in Hamilton. I've explored these experiences with three different analyses: embodiment and its prefiguring of social space; sense of place across a migration timeline; and migration decisions, barriers, and reflections. Each of these analyses was informed by the sense of place literature and was studied using an interpretive phenomenological approach. Embodiment emerged in four broad and overlapping themes: 1) self-understandings of embodied gender and sexuality, 2) experiences with non-physical violence, 3) visibility and invisibility in social space, and 4) disorientation and reorientation within social space. One of the main threads throughout these themes was *motility*; that is, how the capacity for action or movement are prefigured by embodiment, in this case as gendered and sexed bodies. The major contribution of this analysis is that motility is not solely structural or scalar, as sense of place research conventionally regards it (Bolotova et al., 2017). Rather, gender and sexual embodiment are central to the reproduction and navigation of social space. Whereas embodiment has been explored extensively by phenomenology (Husserl, 1931; Merleau-Ponty; Taipale, 2014), gender and sexual embodiment within geographic research still lacks extensive engagement. These findings should therefore be regarded as an example for further directions in research on place and gender and sexual embodiment, where phenomenology is useful in understanding the relationship between these subjects.

Sense of place had the greatest focus in the fourth chapter, where the various dimensions to sense of place from the first chapter (sense-perceptive, relational, and discursive) were the most explicitly featured. The analysis here deliberately avoided trying to compartmentalize sense of place because of its complex and theoretically elusive nature. And to reiterate, the themes in this chapter are not exhaustive or exclusive and should only be regarded as the themes that emerged in the interviews with the 14 specific queer individuals presented. That said, these themes included nature, the city (as 'built' space in general, not a 'nonnatural' space), community, attunement and accessibility, and narratives of gender and sexuality. I mentioned earlier in this chapter that one of its most insightful findings is just how entangled one's sense of place is with their gender and sexuality. Through experience, queer individuals are always already attuned to the world around them—not as abstract space, but as a particular social space that is welcoming or unwelcoming, that is peaceful or stressful. To restate the significance of gender and sexuality here, "phenomenally, we ought not to regard gender and sexuality as cultural or discursive layers that we superimpose onto geometric space, or interpretations of place, but rather as an existential part of an object-place for subjects" (pp. 62). To put it another way, not only are bodies gendered and sexed, but places are too, and are made so through sense-perception, relations, and discourse. A sense of place that overlooks this is, at best, analytically incomplete.

In the fifth chapter, I draw more attention to the increasingly urgent state of queer liberation, particularly in Canada and the United States, but more broadly in the 'Western' world[20]. At the time of submission of this thesis, provincial and state governments in North America have increasingly proposed and introduced legislation targeting gender, romantic, and

[20] This is not to overlook the lives and struggles of queer folks in the Global South and regions that have increasingly faced colonial violence in this decade. Canada and the United States are just the focus of this thesis and my area of specialization.

sexual minorities (Reed, 2023; Trans Legislation Tracker, 2024; Trianon, 2024). Such legislation frequently seeks to restrict, among other things, the visibility, healthcare, and self-determination of transgender individuals, all of which have been regarded as discriminatory (Reed, 2023). None of these issues are independent from mobility and social space, as one of the most extensive surveys in the US has demonstrated (USTS, 2022). Hamilton, Ontario is no exception, where the majority of trans people feel unsafe and half of the city's queer population has faced violence, harassment, or hate crimes (Mills et al., 2019). Overall, the uncertain political climate of the next few years and beyond is of grave concern for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and advocates, and especially BIPOC queer and trans folks.

I highlight these particular statements because they underpin the importance of research into queer and trans mobilities. Among the small sample of queer individuals I interviewed, perceptions of their time in Hamilton varied; most were relatively positive, if at least hopeful and optimistic. This qualification, however, depended highly on one's migration timeline and the other cities they had experienced living in. The decision-making process for migrating was often multi-faceted, with one's queer identity always playing some role in a migration decision, but never independently. For example, housing accessibility was the most common and most significant barrier for participants both before and after moving to Hamilton, but for some participants it also intersected with their queer identity due to experiences with discrimination during the housing process. Additionally, proximity to another place by moving to Hamilton was viewed as beneficial for many reasons, such as proximity to Toronto for greater queer community presence. Overall, migration was viewed by nearly all participants as a trade-off between favourable and unfavourable outcomes, some of which related to their gender and sexuality, and some of which didn't. But most importantly, this chapter demonstrated that migration experiences for queer individuals are not linear, and the questions and challenges that a migration decision poses don't end upon moving. Migrations to Hamilton are learning experiences that queer individuals use to continue to navigate their worlds *as queer*, and to guide where they might migrate next.

My hope is that this research is only the beginning for not only similar studies with greater scope and data, but also for my own involvement with knowledge production on queer experiences with place. In my conversations with queer kin (a term which T taught me) throughout this research, a few had told me that they had never thought of their relationship to place as a queer person, or that they found such a question thought-provoking. I agree; it was a question that inspired me, after coming out myself, to pursue this project. The research process itself was a learning experience for all of us involved, and I think this should be a focus and a valuable outcome of any research going forward; to share knowledge, to build community, and to pursue queer and trans liberation. This requires an understanding that we are spatial subjects in addition to gendered and sexed subjects and that we are not only accountable to one another but to the environments that attend to gender and sexuality in all of its variations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Electronic Recruitment Poster

Appendix 2 – Social Media Recruitment Script

Social Media Recruitment Script:

Are you a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community? Have you recently moved to Hamilton from within Canada? Caris Towle and Dr. Bruce Newbold are seeking participants aged 18–35 to take part in an interview on how queer migrants develop a sense of place in Hamilton. This will be a 2-hour interview over Zoom, and you will receive a $30 incentive for participating. If you are eligible and interested in participating, please contact towlec@mcmaster.ca. This study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Appendix 3 – Email Script for Organizations

Email Script for Contacting Organizations to Aid with Recruitment:

Hello,

My name is Caris Towle, and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Earth, Environment, and Society at McMaster University, studying with Dr. Bruce Newbold. I am currently conducting research on migrants to Hamilton who are members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, aged 18–35, to understand how they develop a sense of place upon moving. This study will consist of a 2-hour interview over Zoom with a $30 incentive for participation. Due to the nature of your [work, organization, etc.], I am reaching out to ask if you might be willing to distribute my recruitment script online such as through social media or otherwise through your social contacts. It is a short description of the research project with my email. I have attached an electronic poster that briefly outlines the project. This study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Caris Towle
McMaster University
(905) 525-9140 ext. 27948
towlec@mcmaster.ca

List of Groups and Organizations to be Contacted:

Hamilton Trans Health Coalition
McMaster Student Union Pride Community Centre
PFLAG Canada – Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter
Pride Hamilton
Speqtrum Hamilton

Appendix 4 – McMaster Research Ethics Board Clearance Letter

McMaster University | Research Ethics Board

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
MREB Secretariat, GH-305
1280 Main St. W.
Hamilton, Ontario, L8W 4L8
email: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca
Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Today's Date: Apr/24/2022

Supervisor: Dr. K. Bruce Newbold
Student Investigator: Mx. Caris Towle
Applicant: Mx. Caris Towle
Project Title: Developing a Sense of Place: Narratives of Queer Youth Migrants to Hamilton, Ontario
MREB#: 5871

Dear Researcher(s)

The ethics application and supporting documents for MREB# 5871 entitled "Developing a Sense of Place: Narratives of Queer Youth Migrants to Hamilton, Ontario" have been reviewed and cleared by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants.

The application is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modifications. The above named study is to be conducted in accordance with the most recent approved versions of the application and supporting documents.

The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. The above named study is to be conducted in accordance with the most recent approved versions of the application and supporting documents.

If this project includes planned in-person contact with research participants, then procedures for addressing COVID-19 related risks must be addressed according to the current processes communicated by the Vice-President (Research) and your Associate Dean (Research). All necessary approvals must be secured before in-person contact with research participants can take place.

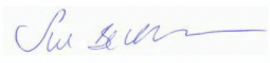
Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the Annual Report in advance of the yearly anniversary of the original ethics clearance date: Apr/24/2023. If the Annual Report is not submitted, then ethics clearance will lapse on the expiry date and Research Finance will be notified that ethics clearance is no longer valid (TCPS, Art. 6.14).

An Amendment form must be submitted and cleared before any substantive alterations are made to the approved research protocol and documents (TCPS, Art. 6.16).

Researchers are required to report Adverse Events (i.e. an unanticipated negative consequence or result affecting participants) to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible, and no more than 3 days after the event occurs (TCPS, Art. 6.15). A privacy breach affecting participant information should also be reported to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible. The Reportable Events form is used to document adverse events, privacy breaches, protocol deviations and participant complaints.

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Response Documents	Response to Reviewer Comments	Apr/07/2022	1
Recruiting Materials	Social Media Script	Apr/07/2022	3
Recruiting Materials	Snowball Recruitment Script	Apr/07/2022	3
Recruiting Materials	Email Script for Organizations	Apr/07/2022	3
Recruiting Materials	Email Script and Screening Questions	Apr/07/2022	2
Interviews	Interview Guide	Apr/07/2022	3
Letters of Support	Support Services	Apr/07/2022	2
Consent Forms	Oral Consent Log	Apr/07/2022	1
Consent Forms	LoI and Oral Consent Questions	Apr/07/2022	3
Recruiting Materials	Electronic Recruitment Poster	Apr/08/2022	3

Dr. Sue Becker



Dr. Violetta Igneski, MREB Chair,
Associate Professor,
Department of Philosophy, UH-308,
905-525-9140 ext. 23462,
igneski@mcmaster.ca

Dr. Sue Becker, MREB Vice-Chair,
Professor,
Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour, PC-312,
905-525-9140 ext. 23020,
beckers@mcmaster.ca

Appendix 5 – Email Script for Participants and Screening Questions

Script for Initial Correspondence with Potential Participants

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in this research project! To ensure you are eligible for participation, please respond to the five screening questions below and send your answers to me.

Please also review the attached Letter of Information for details about the study, along with the consent questions which you will be asked at the beginning of the interview should you take part in this study.

Note that this research project has potential social and psychological risks involved, as I will be asking you sensitive and personal questions. A copy of the interview guide I will be using is also attached below.

Thank you again for your interest in this study, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Caris Towle
McMaster University
towlec@mcmaster.ca

Screening Questions (Asked upon Receipt of an Email Response to Recruitment):

1. Are you a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?
2. Have you moved to Hamilton within the last five years?
3. Are you between the ages of 18–35?
4. Have you immigrated to Canada within the last year?
5. Did you move to Hamilton for the purpose of attending undergraduate studies?

Appendix 6.1 – Letter of Information

APPENDIX
LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

Developing a Sense of Place: Narratives of Queer Youth Migrants to Hamilton, Ontario

Principal Investigator:
Caris Towle
School of Earth, Environment, and Society
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
E-mail: towlec@mcmaster.ca

Supervisor:
Dr. K. Bruce Newbold
School of Earth, Environment, and Society
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 27948
E-mail: newbold@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study:

To further understand the role of gender and sexuality in shaping a migration experience and the development of a sense of place. I am hoping to address three research questions: How do 2SLGBTQIA+ migrants develop a sense of place? How is a migration experience interpreted through individual narratives? And how is normativity exhibited in young 2SLGBTQIA+ migrant narratives? A migrant for the purposes of this study is anyone who makes a permanent or semi-permanent move within Canada. This can include a move between cities, provinces, etc. I am doing this research for a doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr. Bruce Newbold. This is a line of research that I hope to continue in the future and will use your data for this project as well as for future related studies.

Procedures involved in the Research:

This research will consist of a 2-hour interview over Zoom. I will send you a Zoom link scheduled for the date and time of your preference. With your permission, I would like to take hand-written notes, along with an audio and video recording of the interview. However, you may choose to keep your video off if you prefer. During the interview, I would like to ask you some basic demographic questions. These will include age, education, and approximate income. I will also be asking you questions about your migration history, your experiences with gender and sexuality, and social relationships. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. These are a few examples of questions I will ask:

> "What would you say are the main reasons you migrated to Hamilton? Can you expand on these?"
>
> "In any of these places you've mentioned, did you experience any incidents of stigma or discrimination regarding your gender or sexual identity, or your gender expression? Can you expand on them? Are there any other factors that you think might have contributed to this (e.g., race, age, etc.)?"
>
> "How would you characterize perceptions of 'queerness' in Hamilton? How do these compare with other places you have lived in previously? How do these perceptions impact where you go or how you interact in certain places?"

Appendix 6.2 – Letter of Information (Continued)

I would like to follow up with you after the interview and upon preparation of the thesis regarding any changes or additional information you may want to provide. I would also like your feedback on how you wish this research would be best used for the benefit of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and what impacts you would like to see from it.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

The risks involved in participating in this study include social and psychological risks, which are explained below. You may feel uncomfortable with certain questions. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. I will attach a list of Support Resources to this letter for your reference. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy. There is always a minimal risk of data breach with electronic data, but all efforts will be taken to minimize this risk, including a password and meeting ID. The recording from Zoom will *not* be cloud recorded, and will immediately be transferred to MacDrive, a secure file storage location. Finally, there are social risks associated with this type of research, such as identifiability through the details you provide. However, all efforts will be taken to minimize this risk, including anonymization using pseudonyms.

Potential Benefits:

The research will not benefit you directly. I hope to learn more about queer youth experiences in Hamilton, and consequently, how we can improve supports for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, especially those who may lose supports by moving. By doing so, my hope is that this research also contributes to combatting stigma and discrimination against queer youth.

Incentive/Payment or Reimbursement:

You will be given $30 by e-money transfer following the interview. During the interview, I will confirm which email you would like this sent to. If you withdraw from this study after starting the interview, you will still receive the incentive.

Confidentiality:

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. We will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me. We are not collecting any directly identifying information. However, through the combination of demographic variables (e.g., location, gender, age, place of birth, ethnicity, relationship status) it may be possible to identify some participants. Please keep this in mind when deciding whether you want to participate and what questions you answer.

You will be given a random pseudonym for your confidentiality which will be used in the files after recording. You will be asked at the start of the interview if you have a pseudonym you would prefer. Additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy, such as a password and meeting ID that will be required to join the video call. Only you and I will have this information. This study will use the Zoom platform to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. A link to their privacy policy is available here: https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/. No video conferencing platform is considered 'fully secure', and there is a small risk of data collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. You will have the option to turn your video off during the interview if you would prefer.

The information/data you provide will be kept on a computer and will be protected by a password. The audio/video recording will be used only for the purposes of analyzing the interview afterwards and will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Once the study has been completed, any transcriptions or notes will also be destroyed.

Appendix 6.3 – Appendix 5.2 – Letter of Information (Continued)

Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw from) the interview for whatever reason, even after giving consent or part-way through the study or up until **April 30, 2023,** as I will be analyzing the data.

If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. You will still receive the $30 incentive if you choose to withdraw. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

Information about the Study Results:

I expect to have this study completed by approximately **April 2024**. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study:

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

towlec@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Caris Towle and Dr. Bruce Newbold of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time until August 31, 2023.
- I agree to not make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting.
- I have been given a copy of the consent form.
- Having read this letter of information and consent form, I consent to take part in this study.

You will be asked for consent at the time of the interview. You will also be asked the following consent questions.

Appendix 6.4 – Appendix 5.2 – Letter of Information (Continued)

Consent Questions:

If yes,

1. Would you like a copy of the study results? If yes, where should we send them (email address)?
2. Where can we send your incentive (email address)?
3. Do you agree to audio and video recording?
4. Do you agree to be contacted for a follow up regarding your submitted responses? How do you prefer to be contacted (email address)?

Appendix 7.1 – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Interview Guide

1. **I would like to start by asking you some basic demographic questions.** Would you like to choose a pseudonym that I can use to refer to you during the interview and/or in the file after the recording? This is optional.
2. How old are you?
3. What is your level of education?
4. What is your household income?
    a. < $10,000
    b. $10,000 – $19,999
    c. $20,000 – $29,999
    d. $30,000 – $39,999
    e. $40,000 – $49,999
    f. $50,000 – $59,999
    g. $60,000+
5. In what city and country were you born?
6. How do you identify in terms of race or ethnicity?
7. Do you currently have a partner?
8. I would like to compile a migration history. In chronological order, please tell me the places you have lived in and the dates you lived in each one.
    a. Place: Date:
    b. Place: Date:
    c. Place Date:
    d. Etc…

9. **Now I'd like to ask you questions about your gender and sexual orientation.** With regards to gender, how do you identify?
10. What is your sexual orientation?
11. Are there any other terms you use to describe your gender/sexuality? What pronouns do you use?
12. When did you first identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community? (Year; month if possible)
13. When did you first come out as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community? (Year; month if possible)
14. Has your gender/sexuality, or your 'coming out', affected any of your relationships? How so?
15. Has your gender/sexuality, or your 'coming out', ever affected your decision to move? Has it ever changed your engagements with certain social settings?
16. As best as you can, can you describe what coming out was/has been like for you?

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Appendix 7.2 – Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Continued)

17. **Now I'd like to ask more about your social interactions prior to moving to Hamilton.** Can you tell me what it like for you growing up in [previous place]?
18. What characteristics of your childhood (e.g., home, relationships) were significant to you?
19. What specific sites, from any place you previously lived, do you feel most deeply rooted in? (This can be anywhere you have a deep attachment to; a building, a natural environment, etc.). What would you say were important or significant sites of social interaction for you (e.g., home, place of worship, school, etc.)? Why?
20. How were gender and sexuality perceived or spoken of in these earlier sites? Did you feel that they were affirmed or suppressed?
21. In any of these sites you've mentioned, did you experience any incidents of stigma or discrimination regarding your gender or sexual identity, or your gender expression? Are there any other factors that you think might have contributed to this (e.g., race, age, etc.)? Did you experience any comments or situations that made you uncomfortable?

22. **Now I'd like to ask you questions about your move to Hamilton.** Can you tell me about what your experience was like moving to Hamilton?
23. Did your partner move with you (if applicable)?
24. What prompted you to first consider moving away from your previous place of residence? Did you consider any places other than Hamilton? What made you consider them?
25. What would you say are the main reasons you migrated to Hamilton? Can you expand on these?
26. Were there any barriers to you migrating to, or integrating in, Hamilton? What were they?
27. When you first moved to Hamilton, what features about the city did you find familiar? What do you find unfamiliar? Why? Did these features prompt any memories from previous places you've lived?
28. What sites in Hamilton were you attracted to when you first moved here? Why?

29. **Now I'd like to ask you questions about your everyday life in Hamilton.** What is your occupation here (including student status)? Do you have multiple jobs? Do you work full-time or part-time? Is your partner employed?
30. What sites do you visit frequently or on a regular basis? What activities do you enjoy doing there?
31. Have you carried any routines/traditions/customs with you from where you previously lived? How do you make living in Hamilton comfortable or feel like home? Are there any routines/traditions/customs that you have left behind? Can you expand on that?

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Appendix 7.3 – Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Continued)

32. Do you feel that gender and sexuality are relevant to your experiences in places here in Hamilton? What social sites do you feel the most welcome or unwelcome in?
33. How would you characterize perceptions of 'queerness' in Hamilton? How do these compare with other places you have lived in previously? How do these perceptions impact where you go or how you interact in certain places?
34. In Hamilton, have you experienced any incidents of stigma or discrimination regarding your gender or sexual identity, or your gender expression? Are there any other factors that you think might have contributed to this (e.g., race, age, etc.)? Did you experience any comments or situations that made you uncomfortable?
35. How do you express your gender/sexuality in Hamilton? Does this change depending on the places you go?

36. **Now I'd like to ask you questions about how you reflect on your migration and the future.** How do you feel about your decision to migrate to Hamilton now? Do you view it positively or negatively overall? What do you think now of your initial reasons for migrating?
37. What did you hope/expect to gain from migrating to Hamilton before you moved? Do you feel like your expectations were met?
38. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your migration to, or life in, Hamilton?
39. Looking forward five years from now, do you see yourself here in Hamilton or living somewhere else? Do you think Hamilton is a final destination for you? Why or why not?
40. As a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, how do you interpret your migration experiences overall? Did they impact your queer identity, or has your identity impacted your migration experiences? How have other factors of your identity contributed to these?

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Appendix 8 – Oral Consent Log

Oral Consent Log

Consent Questions	**Response**
1. Have you read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Caris Towle and Dr. Bruce Newbold of McMaster University?	
2. Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about your involvement in this study and to receive additional details you requested?	
3. Do you understand that if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw from the study at any time until December 31, 2022?	
4. Do you agree to not make any unauthorized recordings of the content of this meeting?	
5. Have you been given a copy of the consent form?	
6. Having read the Letter of Information and consent form, do you consent to take part in this study?	
7. Would you like a copy of the study results? If yes, where should we send them (email address)?	
8. Where can we send your incentive (email address)?	
9. Do you agree to audio and video recording?	
10. Do you agree to be contacted for a follow up regarding your submitted responses? How do you prefer to be contacted (email address)?	

END